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***De un Día al Otro*: Expressions and Effects of Changing Ideology in National Curriculum and Pedagogy in Nicaraguan Secondary Schools**

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De un Día al Otro: Expressions and Effects of Changing Ideology in National Curriculum and Pedagogy in Nicaraguan Secondary Schools

by

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Abstract

***De un Día al Otro*: Expressions and Effects of Changing Ideology in National Curriculum and Pedagogy in Nicaraguan Secondary Schools**

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Nicaragua has undergone several major upheavals in the last three decades that have fundamentally shaped and reshaped society. The Sandinista government (1979-1990) ended with the election of Violeta Chamorro in 1990 that ushered in 16 years of neoliberal government. In 2006 former president and leader of the current Sandinista Party, Daniel Ortega, was reelected to the presidency. At every step, education has been an essential component of the struggle to shape the state according to certain ideological precepts. Each administration has produced its own educational reforms that are ostensibly in the name of improving quality, but more precisely about developing schools consistent with the philosophy of the ruling classes.

In this study, I seek to examine the Nicaraguan educational system as a site of multiple global and local processes that interact to produce lived experiences for teachers and students in and out of the classroom. In examining the most recent iteration of educational reforms and their effects in the communities of San Marcos, Estelí and Bluefields, I ask the questions: What role or function does education play in society?

How does it "work" to (in most cases) normalize certain values, ideas and beliefs? And what forms do resistance and acquiescence to these processes take in an educational system like that of Nicaragua that has numerous internal and external forces attempting to condition it in contrasting ways?

Major themes that emerge from the research include the prominence of social, historical and geographical factors that people use to fashion their language and perceptions of the world and the dominant influence of local power relations in conditioning people's behaviors and actions. Analysis of responses to the current educational reform efforts demonstrates that local social connections and networks are paramount to studies of ideology and hegemony. The overriding message from Nicaragua is that chronic underfunding and constant reform have weakened the ability of the educational system to disseminate ideas, beliefs and values, particularly when they run counter to those of other powerful institutions in society.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Following the 1990 elections in Nicaragua that marked the end of the Sandinista revolutionary government, the United States approved a two-year $541 million assistance package, including approximately $25 million in political aid channeled through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (Robinson, 2004b). The USAID program in Nicaragua was the largest in the world, making the transformation of the state following the elections practically immediate. As evidence of its importance as an institution of ideological and cultural reproduction, USAID allocated $12.5 million to the Nicaraguan educational system to replace public school textbooks developed under the Sandinista administration. The new textbooks, which were supposedly depoliticized, began with the "Ten Commandments of God's Law," referred to divorce as a "disgrace" and to abortion as "murder," and stressed the importance of "obedience to parents and legitimate authorities." Text on world history asserted that all U.S. interventions were carried out to bring "peace and stability" to countries around the world (Ibid., p. 17-18).

This study intends to examine the Nicaraguan educational system as a site of multiple concurrent processes in constant interaction, the results of which are played out in the classroom setting. It will explore the questions of what role or function does education play in a society? How does it "work" to (in most cases) normalize values, ideas and beliefs, not so that people will all think the same way, but so that people will think the same thing is normal? And what forms do resistance and acquiescence to this process take in an educational system that is rife with internal and external forces

attempting to condition it in different ways? From these questions and others will emerge an analysis that draws on work about ideological and cultural reproduction in society, where the school is both a site of dissemination and inculcation but also the *creation* of values, ideas and beliefs that themselves play a role in shaping Nicaraguan society.

I will use the Nicaragua's educational system as the locus of analysis for several reasons. In the course of the last three decades Nicaraguan society has undergone several major upheavals beginning with the 1979 revolution that brought to power the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN), followed by the election of Violeta Chamorro in 1990 that ushered in 16 years of neoliberal government, and up through the most recent administration of Daniel Ortega and the current Sandinista Party. At each step of the way education was seen as an essential component of the struggle to shape the state according to certain ideological precepts. Thus there have been nearly constant attempts at educational reform that included widespread replacement of key personnel and teaching materials, as well as modifications to procedures, methodologies and management structures surrounding education. The resulting situation is unique to Latin America in that the only constant is constant change, and there have been significant consequences both for the success and efficacy of the educational system and the reforms themselves.

The focus of this study will be on the most recent iteration of educational reforms that began immediately after Ortega assumed power in January of 2007. The new Education Minister, Miguel De Castilla, was a central figure in the Sandinista government of the 1980s as the Vice Minister of Education and a key leader of the

national literacy campaign. He has written 14 books over the course of four decades on various aspects of education and published scores of articles in national newspapers and regional magazines. In his more recent work, De Castilla coordinated several books specifically about pedagogy and school policy, as well as the educational reform process, in Central America (2001; 2004) and Nicaragua (Arríen & De Castilla, 2001a, Arríen & De Castilla, 2001b). A year and a half before De Castilla assumed control of the Education Ministry I began a mission as a Peace Corps volunteer in which my primary role was to teach an economics course in several secondary schools in and around San Marcos, in the Nicaraguan department of Carazo. In addition to teaching and assisting with curriculum development, I facilitated several teacher training sessions in the departments of Carazo, Masaya and Rivas. I benefited from the unique perspective of an outsider working on the inside as I was witness to the educational system before, during and immediately after the De Castilla-led reform process. In this study I will draw on my experiences of working in education in Nicaragua for around two and a half years, paying constant attention to questions of how I am located within social relations and institutions and how this affects my perceptions, ideas and conclusions.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. I will begin with a brief analysis of the extant literature regarding education as it applies to this particular context, highlighting the role of education in the social construction of hegemony, its efficacy as a state ideological apparatus amidst constant reform and ineffectiveness, and the prospects for counter-hegemonic discourses within the educational system. This is followed by a chapter on the educational system in Nicaragua, looking at the historical context and

background in the last three decades that will serve as a foundation for the study of the current reform process. The third chapter will examine in detail the teacher responses and actions that reflect multiple relations of power both internal and external to education that materialize on a daily basis at all levels of the system. I pay particular attention to how local characteristics and contextual factors play a determinant role in how people fashion responses to the matrix of forces attempting to influence both their ideologies and practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on education encompasses a broad range of theories and practices, but for the purposes of this study I will focus on that which discusses the role of education in social formation and how this process plays out *within* the educational system. I will pay particular attention to how processes and discourses within the institution of schooling affect and are affected by the various actors involved, from administrative officials to regional staff, to school directors, teachers and students. These processes and discourses operate within an institution (education) that is essential for constructing and maintaining hegemony in society. The concept of hegemony was originally coined by Lenin and then later developed into a more complete theory by Antonio Gramsci (1971). It refers to the political, economic and ideological power exerted by a dominant group or small collection of groups over other groups in society.

In Gramsci's formulation, the ruling class dominates not only the means of production but also the means of symbolic production. It rules at the level of ideas

through control over social institutions such as education, culture, religion and the media to disseminate values that allow for virtual perpetuity of the status quo. Dominant groups continuously construct ideological hegemony by bounding social ideas to the plausible or implausible, incorporating difference that does not threaten domination (i.e. culture as folklore) and precluding resistance that threatens current relations of power. In Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony, the values and ideas of the ruling class become the 'common sense' values and ideas of everyone in society. The working class is able to identify with the ruling class in ways that produce willing consent for them to be governed by others.

The concept of ideology defies easy definition. On a more elemental level, it refers to a system of ideas, beliefs and values about reality, that is, how one interprets the world around them. But it is also the case that ideologies are constructed and shaped by social forces such as race, class, gender and ethnicity that are at all times reflected in them. Stuart Hall (1986) defines ideology as, "the mental frameworks- the languages, concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation- which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works" (p. 26). Different ideologies, therefore, exist in society with different scopes and functions. While it is true that no two are exactly alike, it is the case that sufficient commonality exists to both classify them and then privilege one over another in society.

It follows then that a dominant ideology, with an accompanying rational for its superiority, will emerge, and subsequent processes of socialization increase the

probability that the social order is maintained by making the status quo appear normal. This is not to say that inheritance of norms, customs and ideologies is necessarily an inevitable outcome. Resistance is observable at every instance of power, though the forms it takes might not be immediately visible. Michael Apple (1995) argues that "students participate in the *contested* reproduction of the ideological and material system of which they are a part" (p. 84). But in order to devalue or attenuate resistance the dominant ideology must utilize a collection of cultural, ideological and economic institutions to rationalize the social order.

As an institution of both inculcation *and* production of culture and ideology with economic interests in mind, the school is a critical site of socialization of the dominant culture. Roger Williams (1976) states, "the educational institutions are usually the main agencies of transmission of an effective dominant culture, and this is now a major economic as well as cultural activity; indeed it is both in the same moment" (p. 204-205). There are two characteristics commonly ascribed to schools that afford it generally unquestioned legitimacy in society; it is politically, ideologically and culturally neutral, and it is a meritocracy where students' success or lack thereof is based solely on their abilities. But to understand schools in this fashion, and how students succeed or fail within them, one must forego notions of neutrality when it comes to culture and ideology. Instead, careful consideration of the manner in which social forces and disparate power relations are constitutive of both is required.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) argued that education was not the effective agent of progressive social reform as previously thought. The authors also dispelled the notion

that schools are a true meritocracy in which the only factor for success is ability. Instead, economic forces are the most influential consideration in how education is structured, and Bowles and Gintis argued that schools basically reproduce and legitimate an unequal class structure from one generation to another. While their primary argument about the school's role in reproducing the social order is valid, they fail to consider all the ways in which this occurs. Unequal economic relations are reproduced in society because they are legitimated by cultural practices. Bowles and Gintis point out (correctly) that there is a sorting mechanism in schools for economic purposes, but it is conducted through cultural means when certain knowledges are privileged over others. As Apple (1990) states, schools "enhance and give legitimacy to particular types of cultural resources which are related to unequal economic forms" (p. 36). Culture is not only a mere reflection of economic practices, nor a simple representation of (unequal) social relations. Instead, its production and valuing or devaluing of certain cultural attributes has a direct influence on economic and social relations in a society.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argued that education facilitates reproduction of social conditions in three ways: formal curriculum and tests that value certain cultures and knowledges over others, hidden curriculum that socializes students in cultures, values, behaviors and attitudes (students are socialized according to class, race, gender, ethnicity, etc.), and through separate schooling systems (public-private, urban-rural, etc.). The idea is that education goes well beyond dissemination of facts by privileging certain knowledges and cultural capital that then become a part of students' ideologies and helps

them to explain the social order around them. Althusser (1971) refers to this as "'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology" (p. 155).

Bourdieu extends the argument further when he acknowledges that the ruling ideology is inherently unequal and requires a process of legitimation. Education fulfills this requirement by presenting both itself and the social order as true meritocracies based primarily on ability. As he states, "by making social hierarchies and the reproduction of those hierarchies appear to be based on merits or skills the education system fulfills a function of legitimation which is more and more necessary for the perpetuation of the 'social order' and ruthless affirmation of power relations" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 496). Formal curriculum and testing have both been frequently cited as sites where the social order is rationalized, but the more subtle hidden curriculum plays a larger role than either in socialization.

The concept of hidden curriculum was first developed by John Dewey (1916), and later coined by Philip Jackson (1968), to describe the unarticulated and unacknowledged knowledges, values and beliefs that are part of the learning process in schools. Though specific definitions of hidden curriculum can vary, for our purposes the term refers to the practices, rules and activities embedded in education that teach students certain norms and ideas about society. Apple goes so far as to give precedence to hidden curriculum over the formal variety in his analysis of social reproduction. "The State, through control of education, facilitates social reproduction of legitimate culture, knowledge and skills tied up to economic inequality; it does this by means of socialization and 'hidden curriculum'" (Apple, 1980, p. 40). This is logical particularly at the primary level where

the educational material is generally more basic and fairly standardized. In such instances, the process of learning may actually be more relevant to the socialization process than what is actually learned. For the purposes of my study, hidden curriculum plays a central role in an educational system that lacks textbooks and other physical materials used to learn. The practices of dictation, copying and rote memorization are endemic in Nicaraguan secondary schools, and though there are always exceptions they are oftentimes capable of stifling independent and creative thought in the classroom.

The question is then how the process of socialization that takes place in education through formal and hidden curriculum, sorting into separate categories, and separate school systems affects peoples' identity formations. The ruling class in society dominates other classes in economic relations, but this is only part of the picture. As Apple (1980) points out, "domination can be ideological as well as material" (p. 123). And institutions such as churches, schools, mass media and others provide people with the language they can use to describe their environment and create their own identity. This discourse is ostensibly neutral, but that is hardly the case because, as Foucault (1990) notes, "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (p. 100). One group's power over others is achieved by controlling the discourse, and this is accomplished through a value system that privileges the dominant knowledge and culture. Schools appear to be a meritocracy because presumably any student is able to acquire knowledge in them that will later translate into economic capital. This argument is valid on its face and undoubtedly occurs in societies around the world, but the knowledge that is acquired in school, as well as the cultural capital necessary for upward

mobility within the school system, is controlled by the ruling class such that it reflects the dominant ideology. Again we return to Apple (1980), who points out that "…knowledge *is* power, but primarily in the hands of those who have it already, who already control cultural capital as well as economic capital" (p. 154).

Gramsci's analytical lens in most of his theoretical work is placed squarely on the level of nation, encapsulated by the forces at work within national borders. In one of his few statements regarding the international arena, he acknowledges that his model is complicated by other powerful forces beyond the national ruling class. Gramsci (1971) states that "a particular ideology, for instance, born in a highly developed country, is disseminated in less developed countries, impinging on the local interplay of combinations" (p. 182). The complication is most evident in cases where competing dominant groups in society have distinct ideologies, and one or the other benefits from their affinity with the ideology of powerful external forces that can offer material and psychological resources. Because ideology is in a continuous process of (re)creation, external forces from developed countries, with their access to substantial resources, are able to influence social ideas in so-called undeveloped countries from their very inception until the time they become dominant.

This is not to say that competing ideologies in an undeveloped country originate from abroad, and therefore are simply a reflection of the ideology of the international ruling class. But it is true that they are subject to a web of external forces that are capable of privileging certain ideas and values that are more in accord with their own, in the process influencing the dominant ideology or common sense of the underdeveloped

country to achieve consent to the hegemony of the international ruling class. The interaction between global and local hegemony is underrepresented in the literature, in part because of the difficulty inherent to determining the true origins and intentions of people's actions and discourse. Nevertheless, Robinson (2004a) and others have pointed out that notions of ideological hegemony developed in the West do not adequately map to the contexts of developing countries where the hierarchies of power are transformed by external forces.

In contrast to Gramsci's belief that hegemony of the ruling groups can produce willing consent by the masses while incorporating counter-hegemonic movements, Scott (1985) argues that there is much more resistance to the dominant ideology than is typically observed. He contends that Gramsci was mistaken in looking primarily for radical, conscious resistance in the actions of subordinated classes rather than looking at the more subtle, mundane practices that are both far less extreme and far more common. These everyday forms of resistance, such as foot dragging, false compliance, feigned ignorance, etc., seem ordinary and require little or no coordination and planning. The most important element of these types of resistance, what Scott refers to as the 'weapons of the weak', is the perception of consent, even though it is only partially present. As Scott states, "What is conveyed is the *impression* of compliance without its substance... It is almost as if symbolic compliance is maximized precisely in order to minimize compliance at the level of actual behavior" (1985, p. 26). These acts of resistance are profoundly different from Gramsci's 'war of position' that requires a large-scale, premeditated intellectual effort to conduct ideological subversion, invoking the idea of

multiple levels of resistance, but they do indicate some level of defiance to the dominant values and ideas.

The notion of small-scale resistance to the dominant ideology can benefit from an articulation with Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) ideas of cultural and social capital. For Bourdieu, cultural capital comes in two forms: the intangible set of dispositions and practices, and the tangible cultural assets such as books, pictures, dictionaries and equipment. Both forms are useful for upward social mobility beyond economic means. Social capital is comprised of the resources that stem from memberships in groups and networks that provide support and influence. Social and cultural forms of capital, in combination with the economic, constitute assets that allow not only for upward social mobility but also the freedom of oppositional action with minimal repercussions. The social connections and networks that people possess constitute a source of power that allows them more opportunity to determine what they say and do. The unequal distribution of social capital in society means that some will be less restrained than others to speak and act as they desire. Similarly, those folks who posses more cultural capital will have the knowledge and ability to structure their small-scale resistance in such a way as to avoid potentially harmful reprisal. Together, social and cultural capital have significant explanatory potential in analyses of the local context that seek to determine the forms and the capabilities of different people to resist their environment.

Scott's 'weapons of the weak' argument sustains his other critique of Gramsci, that subordinate classes are far more radical or resistant at the level of ideology than

Gramsci acknowledges. This is the case because beliefs and ideas are much easier to disguise and protect, unlike behaviors and actions that are more observable and easily constrained. Presumably this applies to discourse as well, outside of the most intimate situations in which the person feels comfortable acknowledging difference with the dominant ideology. Scott's analysis is problematic because he does not account for how people's learned words and actions can, over time, influence their ideologies as they become habitual. This would extend his argument with an explanation for how the oppositional processes of acceptance and resistance can coexist. For example, the worker who does his or her job poorly, but readily acknowledges the necessity of having that job, or one similar to it, in order to survive and improve their basic material conditions. With the everyday resistance comes the tacit assumption that they will need to perform some function in the very system that they oppose. Scott is valid in arguing that analysis should focus on lived experiences that may be more important for most people than larger historical and cultural factors as they fashion identities in their environment. But the ultimate conclusion may be that the hegemony of the ruling class is *complete enough* when it is able to control behavior.

The role of education in ideological process requires an analysis of how they are situated within a society vis-à-vis the state and other social institutions. To fully analyze the relationship between education and the state, we must consider the role of the state in conceptualizing social policy. La Belle (1986) and others note the need to consider any potential correlations between the form of state and the type, target population and purposes of education. What mode of governance prefers which type of education, for

whom, and to what ends. Organizational and funding priorities in social policies are oftentimes representative of governing ideologies, and they work to reinforce the legitimacy of the state and to justify its actions, thus ensuring the conditions of reproduction. In addition to reproducing the necessary technical knowledge and skills they also ensure in most cases "a submission to the rules of the established order" (Althusser, 1971, p. 132). That is, education normalizes the dominant ideology, making "how things are" in society seem normal and within reason.

Though education can be utilized to legitimate the political system it also may serve as a site of contestation by equipping individuals with the knowledge and abilities to alter class formation in society. The relationship between education and the state is not only one of mutual dependence, but also one in which education normalizes certain values and ideas that legitimize the state. The question then becomes how education reflects certain concepts or ideas belonging to the state. In what ways does education operate as mirror image of the state, working to legitimize the ruling classes in control of the state, and in what ways are people within the educational system able to actively or passively resist? Carnoy and Samoff (1990) examine by way of case studies the process in which the state utilizes education as a means of social transformation. They demonstrate how shifting policies work to construct education that socializes students differently within socialist and capitalist governments. This is due in large part to the complimentary social institutions who maintain similar ideologies that are easily incorporated into the ideas of the ruling class.

In the modern globalized world identities are increasingly shaped by global forces that traverse borders, cultures and races, and this phenomenon is particularly predominant in developing countries. Arturo Escobar (1995) has argued that the long-term proliferation of development discourses in the so-called third world has contributed to the creation of identities in marginalized populations who see themselves as underdeveloped and in need of development. This phenomenon is underrepresented in Western scholarship on resistance to globalization that has typically discounted consideration of how it relates to everyday practices in the local culture. Escobar (2001) argues that such analyses must be attune to "place-based practices" that would further the discussion of how a specific group of people are interacting with a global process whose characteristics, and therefore responses to them, may be assumed *a priori*. He contends that "local groups, far from being passive receivers of transnational conditions, actively shape the processes of constructing identities, social relations and economic processes" (2001, p. 155). This approach to scholarship in Latin America is still underutilized today, as difficulties beyond logistical considerations complicate such research. Studies of social reproduction in other contexts require extensive investigation into how people form their ideologies and explain the world around them. The role of social institutions in these contexts, with all of their "place-based" practices and characteristics that are at once a representation of their local environment as well as exterior forces that attempt to shape them, is one potential avenue for examining ideology formation from the outside.

METHODOLOGY & DATA

Teachers

Data was collected over a period of five weeks during July and August while I visited secondary schools in three separate communities- one large school each in San Marcos and Estelí, and five smaller schools in Bluefields. The first two communities were selected to provide varying contexts in the Spanish-speaking and Spanish-descendant, largely *mestizo* population on the Pacific Coast. Bluefields was chosen for its size and diversity of ethnic populations as the department capital of the largely Afro- and English-descendant Caribbean Coast, also known as the Atlantic Coast. First-person interviews were conducted with teachers privately in empty school classrooms and/or libraries during the regular school day. Special emphasis was placed on interviews with teachers from social studies and human sciences classes, though all those available were petitioned. Additionally, I interviewed several Education Ministry officials at the regional and municipal levels to construct a more complete picture of the environment surrounding schools.

A total of 23 teacher interviews were conducted according to the following breakdown: San Marcos (6), Estelí (6), and Bluefields (11). All of the teachers lived in the community of their school, and the gender divide of the interviewees was nearly even, with 11 females and 12 males. The socioeconomic status of the interviewees showed some variation, though none could be considered as upper class and the majority fell in a range from lower middle class to working class. Teachers expressed a general openness

and willingness to discuss matters related to Nicaragua's educational system and the school reform process. From my own personal experiences I had expected frank discussions that would commonly diverge for extended periods of time into tangents as teachers would express strong feelings about a certain topic. This proved to be the case as most teachers felt one element or another related to education in general or school reform in particular merited special attention.

The interviews were structured to last from one to two hours, and they were based on a series of questions separated into five categories. After giving a brief account of their professional history and the recent past of the Nicaraguan educational system, participants were asked questions on the topics of education and its role in society, the form and purpose of curriculum, the importance and evolution of pedagogy in their school, and finally their thoughts and perceptions of the education reform process that began in 2003 and continued in a different direction under new leadership in 2007. Together, the questions were designed create and foster a discussion that would elucidate on the teacher's personal feelings, beliefs and ideology as they relate to education. Interviews were generally quite fluid and dynamic as most teachers had little trepidation about discussing topics from their everyday environment.

Students

The data consists of approximately 280 questionnaires completed by Nicaraguan youth in their final year of secondary school. Questionnaires were conducted in school classrooms during the regular school day. To mitigate feelings of unease or privacy

concerns, no teachers or school officials were allowed to be present during the survey process. Students were notified that all data would remain anonymous and be kept strictly confidential. The demographic information of the students who participated in the questionnaire is as follows.[1] The students' ages ranged from 15 to 23, with the average age at roughly 17 years old. The large range is due to the fact that occasionally students are held back from one year to the next during their time in secondary school. Approximately 60 percent of the students were female and 40 percent were male, and these percentages hold relatively steady across the three communities.

The religious breakdown of the students varies between the Pacific and Caribbean sides of the country, with San Marcos and Estelí exhibiting relatively high percentages of Catholic and Evangelical populations. Conversely, students in Bluefields represent a wide range of religions as it would be expected due to the prevalence of various missionary groups that have had a presence in the region for centuries. The students' socioeconomic status (SES) showed significant variation within each school as a small subset of students were determined to have a relatively high status compared to their peers using the methodology described below, followed by a large percentage of students in the middle ranges and relatively small group of students near the bottom of the scale. There was little variation in terms of SES between schools or communities. Students from Bluefields have the highest collective SES score, followed by Estelí and then San Marcos.

[1] See the Appendix for more demographic information and statistical analysis. There are tables and/or bar graphs for gender, religion and SES based on mother's education, father's education and household possessions.

There is a significant difficulty inherent to studies of this nature that take place in Latin America with accurately calculating socioeconomic status for the purpose of comparisons. There are a variety of opinions about the most accurate method for calculating socioeconomic status, particularly in contexts where all potential factors are not easily quantified and measurable. Arias and De Vos (1996) have argued in favor of using home measures such as the type of wall and roof materials, electricity and sewage facilities to determine SES in Latin America due to the difficulties in measuring income. Assessing the physical aspects of each student's home was not practical in this study, and questions about possessions in the home such as cell phone, TV, computer and car were used instead. Entwisle and Astone (1994) contend that mother and father's education are useful for measuring human capital and the long-term outlook of the family. Due to the lack of breadth in occupations in Nicaragua, the education level of the parents, as well as cultural possession e.g. desk, dictionary, calculator and other study implements and home possessions e.g. cell phone, television and computer, were utilized to determine the SES of the students. Using the aggregate of these attributes as an indicator of SES, students in the three communities represent a measurement of the SES in their respective communities.

The surveys consisted of questions separated into six sections: demographic information, free time activities, school opinions, classroom pedagogy and short-answer questions on the definition of several terms. The demographic section asked for age, gender religion and SES using the methodology described earlier of parents' education and cultural and economic possessions in the home. Students were then asked to report

how much time they spend doing one of several activities, including watch TV, household chores, play sports, homework, talk to friends, etc. These responses are important because Nicaraguan secondary students are in school for less than five hours a day, with numerous days off during the school year. Therefore, they spend much less time in school than their counterparts in the Western world. The third and fourth sections of the surveys attempted to measure students' opinions of school and their perceptions of classroom dynamics, respectively. Questions in the latter group asked questions such as how often the teacher stands at the front of the room and dictates while students copy or the frequency of classroom discussions with student input and examples from outside the curriculum. Finally, students were asked for their definitions of quality education and several values (independence, nationalism, sovereignty and autonomy) that were an explicit part of the curriculum for all teachers in the month of July.

The ideological perspectives, the way in which one positions himself or herself in relation to others along lines of dominant/subordinate, empowered/powerless, norm/exception, etc., and the personal identities that all make up a person's positionality are central to any analysis. How a researcher describes their social position in relation to their participants and the environment in which they live is central to every aspect of the research process. In particular, one must first consider the potential effects of the disparate power relations that exist between interviewer and interviewee, and how they will influence responses to questions or the type and quantity of information willing to be shared. And secondly, researchers should recognize the effect that their own subjectivity might have on those aspects of the study they choose to emphasize and how they interpret

what they observe. How one interprets a certain phenomenon and its context directly impacts what information is sought and which questions are privileged over others. The interviews conducted in this ethnography explore some extremely personal ideologies and philosophies that whether they are conscious or subconscious are difficult to perceive in another person, let alone in a few hours of conversation. The situation is further complicated by the fact that I am a white male from the United States interviewing Nicaraguan educators and government officials whose country has a long history of being subjected to intervention on the part of the U.S military. Familiarity between me and the teacher being interviewed ranged from close friendships of more than five years to having met only moments before the interview. In either extreme, or any case in between, the fact that I am an outsider to the community and the school was a constant influence on the interview process and the subsequent collected data.

Considerations of positionality do not end when the interviews finish. They are present throughout the writing process as the researcher interprets his or her data and arrives at a conclusion about what implications their study has for others. Above all else, what is referred to as data in this essay constitutes the lived practices of another person as they navigate their own reality using their personal ideology as a guide. While these issues can never be fully resolved, it is necessary that I take them into account during my analysis as I attempt to reach an understanding of the situation that best reflects my understanding of the interview participants' thoughts and perceptions. And their feedback to my own perceptions is a necessary step in the process of arriving at a

conceptualization that itself is not static but instead always fluctuating along with changes to those lived realities reflected in the study.

Chapter Two: Nicaragua's Educational System

Background and Context

The institution of education in Nicaragua has been, as one author puts it, "contested terrain" where the struggle between different forces for political and cultural influence has been waged for decades. Economic and political forces in Nicaraguan society have affected every facet of education from school finances and management to curriculum and pedagogy. The Sandinista revolutionary government implemented widespread reforms to the educational sector immediately after assuming power in 1979 that were aimed at expanding access to free education at all levels. While some programs such as the nation-wide literacy campaign were largely successful, others such as expanding education where it was previously nonexistent produced several deficiencies and unintended consequences. The election in 1990 of Violeta Chamorro of the *Unión Nacional Opositora* (UNO) coalition of 14 political parties signaled the beginning of comprehensive neoliberal political and economic reforms that dramatically rearranged Nicaraguan society. In addition to modifications to the curricula like the example mentioned above, the educational sector was decentralized, schools were granted autonomy in decision-making, and user fees for education were introduced. Since that time, education has continued to serve as a locus of both acquiescence and contestation for multiple national and global processes.

That education was a priority of the Sandinista revolutionary government was evidenced by the speed with which they implemented numerous profound changes to

formal education and their early commitment to nonformal education, both aimed at fundamentally transforming Nicaraguan society. Public school enrollment doubled in the first four years of the revolution, access to national universities was expanded to rural and indigenous populations through quotas and scholarships, and the number of teachers had tripled by 1989 (Arríen & Matus, 1989; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1993). In addition to increasing access and availability, systematic changes to curriculum and pedagogy were made at all educational levels to reflect the Sandinistas' philosophy of a collective and participatory learning environment that focused on economic development and overcoming dependency. The government established a national textbook industry with a donated printing press from the Dutch government. A concerted effort was made to incorporate secondary schools and universities into their communities through volunteer projects and fieldwork directed at solving everyday problems.

From the onset the Sandinistas emphasized popular education programs centered on adult literacy and basic education. Drawing from the Cuban revolutionary model, they initiated a literacy campaign aimed at reducing the country's historically high illiteracy rates. The National Literacy Crusade that began in 1980 more than halved the illiteracy rate from approximately 50 percent to under 23 percent in roughly five months (Arnove, 1987). Immediately following the campaign, the government launched a program of adult basic education that relied on volunteers from Sandinista youth, neighborhood and women's associations. Educational endeavors were based on the principles of *concientización* (conscious raising) and popular education that drew in part

on the philosophy of the Brazilian, Paulo Freire (2000) who argued that a more politically aware and literate population would be better suited to struggle for greater political and economic power. Popular education is distinguished from other types of education by its pedagogy and political ideology. In terms of pedagogy, popular education proposes participatory and egalitarian learning that focuses on communal knowledges, while its political philosophy promotes work with marginalized populations (women, youths, indigenous, etc.) to facilitate efforts for social change. The Sandinista attempts at consciousness-raising as part of their popular education programs often contained topics such as the heroes of the revolution, the negative impact of U.S. intervention in the region, and the incorporation into the national government of indigenous populations on the Atlantic Coast (La Belle, 2000, p. 25). As the war with the Contras progressed through the mid to late 1980s, budgetary expenditures for all social spending, including education and health, were dramatically cut for increases in defense spending.

The multiple educational initiatives during the Sandinista government were not without their failings and detractors. Many of the popular education programs relied on volunteer and youthful teachers who had received minimal schooling themselves. Likewise, efforts to incorporate new teaching methodologies and practices were at times thwarted by lack of resources or resistance from the teachers. The pervasive poverty throughout the country, particularly in the rural areas, allowed little time and energy to dedicate towards education. Even the successful literacy campaign was criticized by segments of the Catholic and Evangelical churches as too political and secular (Dodson, 1980, as cited in Arnove, 1994, p. 26). A combination of a vastly expanded teaching

force with insufficient efforts to train and educate new teachers meant that 60 percent of the teachers in the formal education system were still uncertified at the end of the decade (Arnove, 1994, p. 23). The U.S.-backed counterrevolutionaries, known as the Contras, had a significant, deleterious effect on education in Nicaragua. In addition to a sizeable shift in national budget priorities away from social programs and towards military defense, the Contras directly targeted educational and health workers in rural centers. More than 300 popular teachers died while fighting or were assassinated and more than 500 rural educational collectives were closed due to direct sabotage or threats to students attending evening classes (Arnove & Torres, 1995, p. 321). All of the aforementioned factors contributed to declining enrollment rates in both formal and nonformal education, high attrition rates for teachers and an increasing illiteracy rate at the close of the decade.

Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s several governments in Latin America started to transition away from the import substitution industrialization model with a package of economic and political reforms aimed at reducing the state's role in social service provision and the market. The reforms collectively came to be known as the "Washington Consensus" after the Washington D.C.-based institutions that advocated for them (Williamson, 2004). In cutting state social spending and privatizing state industries, they encouraged relying on the free market for economic and social decisions. In accordance with a central tenet of liberalism, the individual would become the primary arbiter in decisions regarding social services such as education and health, equal parts consumer with options and user with social obligations. The conversion to a neoliberal state occurred with varying speed in Latin America as some countries such as Chile

began earlier while others like Nicaragua would come later. The rise of neoliberalism in the region also coincided with a widespread transition to democratic governance. The reduction in state spending on social services and increased emphasis on democracy were both central goals of the incoming Violeta Chamorro administration in 1990.

The government of Violeta Chamorro inherited an educational system that had achieved several noteworthy successes primarily in the initial years of the revolution and then suffered significant setbacks as a result of the internal conflict, declining economy and several missteps in social policy. The new administration took over an educational system in 1990 that saw only 19 percent of students satisfactorily complete primary school, and only 25 percent of the eligible population was enrolled in secondary school (Gobierno de Nicaragua, 1996). The education ministry, led by the ardent anti-Sandinista and Opus Dei member Humberto Belli, quickly implemented widespread and profound reforms aimed at another wholesale transformation of the Nicaraguan educational system. In one of the first reforms implemented by the Chamorro administration the education ministry's staff was reduced by half in the first two years (Arnove, 1994, p. 102). The rationale behind the cuts was that the ministry of education was too large and bureaucratic, inefficient, and unable to communicate effectively between the national and local level. In addition to various austerity measures, the new ministry, reflecting on the low enrollment and high dropout rates of primary education, placed a greater emphasis on primary schools over higher education.

The decentralization process in Nicaragua that occurred in the early 1990s promoted a shift from central to municipal governance and increasing school autonomy

through school councils composed of educators and parents. Both initiatives were ostensibly concerned with increasing democratic decision-making at the local level. The transition to municipal governance was intended to allow for greater local impact in administrative and pedagogical matters. In the interest of transitioning to a state with no more than a subsidiary role in education, it would only intervene or assist in areas where the local government requested assistance. The rationale behind the changes to democratize educational decisions was multifaceted. They were intended to reduce local clientelism, a problem endemic to Nicaraguan society, by introducing councils and committees to the decision-making process. Additionally, the reforms sought to increase accountability by increasing the participation of local actors who would in theory be more responsive to the demands of the communities where they lived. Local actors were essential to the process due to the heterogeneous demands and priorities of Nicaraguan communities. Finally, the education ministry was optimistic that by eliminating much of the national bureaucracy and empower teachers and community leaders local decision-making would create an environment more conducive to reform.

The move to decentralize education in Nicaragua was unique for several reasons. The education ministry's adjustment plan under Humberto Belli was one of the most radical in Latin America, and it gave more responsibility to parents than any other such program (Gershberg, 1999b, p. 8). The program was also unique for the method in which it was enacted; educational reforms were implemented through a series of directives from the education ministry with no involvement from the legislature or voting into law any of the reforms. In fact, many of the ministry's initiatives were never made public and the

decentralization of education was not codified until almost a decade later. The changes to school governance and methodology occurred with almost no underlying legal framework, in contrast to countries such as Mexico or Colombia where reforms were approved by multiple levels of government prior to implementation (Gershberg, 1999a, p.64).

Programs to decentralize the school system were accompanied by massive publicity campaigns on the part of the education ministry and its regional delegates. Support for the campaign was provided by the World Bank, who also had a direct hand in designing Nicaragua's decentralization process. The reforms were also not without precedent. In 1963 the Nicaraguan government had published a document entitled "Blueprint for the Development of the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua" where it laid out proposals for adjusting higher education institutions to align them with their counterparts in the United States in exchange for funding from Inter-American Development Bank and the Ford Foundation.

The principal policy reform associated with decentralization was the Autonomous Schools Program (ASP) enacted in 1993. The program essentially combined local school management in the form of a council composed of the school principal, teachers and parents of students in the selected according to certain criteria with a system of fees to fund expenses such as teacher salaries and building maintenance. The *Consejo Directivo* (Directive School Council) was charged with powers over the school budget, personnel decisions and some input into curriculum and event planning. The fee system consisted of monthly transfers for teacher salaries and school maintenance as well as other service

fees for exams, forms, diplomas and access to the school library or computer lab that are used to augment teacher salaries. School fees were justified on the grounds that the current tax collection system was inadequate to provide sufficient funding for education, and they could serve as an additional revenue source. Additionally, their potential to enhance salaries was helpful in convincing teachers to endorse the switch to autonomy, despite its call for greater oversight. In adherence to neoliberal ideology that stressed prioritizing primary education over secondary, both types of fees were supposedly mandatory for secondary schools and voluntary in primary schools. In practice this was not always the case as some secondary schools do not charge fees and some primary schools pressured parents to pay them (Gershberg, 1999a, p. 74).

The Autonomous School Program grew rapidly in its initial stages after 1993. Within three years, around 100 of 250 secondary schools and over 200 of a total 4,288 primary schools had entered the program (King et al., 1996). Growth continued through the remainder of the decade as by 2000 an estimated 85 percent of all elementary schools were integrated into the program (Morales, 2000). All of this growth occurred despite the fact that the program was not officially enacted into law until the passage of the Education Participation law in 2002. Initially, secondary schools were targeted because they were larger, run by a more experienced principal, and it was more common for them to charge fees. The first 20 secondary schools to participate in the program were selectively chosen based on characteristics that indicated greater odds for success. The education ministry heavily promoted the program through ministry delegates that were trained in its philosophy and components with support from USAID. The fee system was

by far the most controversial facet of the program, though its potential to augment teacher salaries was essential towards convincing them to accept oversight by the school councils. To parents with sufficient financial resources to pay the charges, the school councils were appealing for their ability to offer parents a means to influence decisions about teachers, curriculum and school hours.

Newly autonomous schools created an entirely new social dynamic around education that reflected shifting relations of power brought on by the reforms. School councils provided parents with new spaces to contest for change in the system, and they often did in unpredictable ways. The Catholic Church was granted an unprecedented degree of influence in decisions regarding pedagogy and curriculum. Classroom prayers were introduced into schools, and students were required to "civic education" classes that promoted conservative Catholic doctrine on moral and social issues (Carr, 1993, p. 10). In one instance, several Catholic families successfully advocated in the local school council for the removal of sex education in their school. Local public officials at the *alcaldía* (mayor's office) were able to utilize the councils both as an additional means of influence as well as a vehicle for legitimacy in the community.

For their part, teachers did not always receive the benefits afforded to them in the new system as raises in salary and bonuses oftentimes failed to materialize due to disparate fee collection. Schools with more students from families able to afford the fees had better facilities and higher teacher salaries while schools in poor and particularly rural communities had low rates of fee payment and lacked the corresponding benefits, detrimentally affecting teacher morale (Gershberg, 1999b, p. 19-24). Fees were

exempted for students in the first four years of primary school, rural students, or students from poor families who received good grades, though in practice exemptions were not always granted (Arnove, 1997, p. 91). School principals benefitted disproportionately from the reforms through increased autonomy in terms of decision-making and their positions on the councils and new functions as administrators of teacher salaries and benefits allotted them bestowed upon them additional influence.

The transition to neoliberal education that began in Nicaragua in the early 1990s was not without precedent. Chile under Pinochet, Argentina under the military junta and Brazil under several administrations had all implemented some form of neoliberal education prior to Nicaragua's transition. In nearly every case, reforms were structured by the major IFIs, primarily the World Bank, and governments did little to adapt or customize the recommendations for their specific context. As education increasingly became a site of contestation to neoliberal reforms, governments implemented massive advertising campaigns to stress that the old system was inherently flawed and incapable of modernization. More contemporary efforts at decentralization, autonomy and free market principles in Peru and Mexico have met with varying levels of success and resistance from the educational sector.[2] Mexico provides a particularly illustrative case in comparison with Nicaragua as many neoliberal reforms were implemented through the legislative process rather than ministry initiatives. In contrast to the Nicaraguan government's approach to modifying the national educational system through internal ministry directives, several of which were not made public, the Mexican government first

[2] For a cogent, in-depth analysis of neoliberal education in other contexts, see Puiggrós (1999).

accomplished an agreement with all of the country's 31 governors and then passed laws in the national legislature (Gershberg, 1999a, p. 68-74). In Nicaragua, a victory for the incumbent party in 1996 ensured continuity with the education ministry, and the Minister of Education was the only minister to be reappointed by incoming president, Arnoldo Alemán.

There are four primary teachers unions in Nicaragua, separated along political and geographic divisions. The largest and most powerful, *La Asociación Nacional de Educadores de Nicaragua* (ANDEN) (National Association of Nicaraguan Educators) vehemently opposed the educational reforms. It launched a publicity campaign labeling the Autonomous Schools Program (ASP) as privatization but was unable to significantly detain the program's expansion (Gershberg, 1999a, p. 75). Ultimately, infighting between multiple teachers unions that prevented a unified front may have allowed the autonomous schools program to succeed. Moreover, because the educational reforms were enacted by the ministry with no vote in the Nicaragua's legislative body, ANDEN's political affiliation with the opposing party, the Sandinistas, was of no assistance in the struggle. This situation contrasts sharply with that of neoliberal education in Mexico where the largest teachers union was allied with the governing party and assisted the reforms as they were voted into law by the national legislature.

In addition to major efforts to decentralize the Nicaraguan educational system, of which the project to create autonomous schools was the primary component, neoliberal reforms were responsible for several other noteworthy changes. During the 1990s there was a concerted effort on the part of the World Bank and other IFIs to deemphasize most

types of nonformal education provided by the state such as literacy and adult basic education. The Nicaraguan government followed suit in part as a result of stipulations in IFI loan contracts and also because it sought a clear ideological and structural break from the popular education movements of the Sandinista government in the 1980s. This was problematic in the context of mid 1990s Nicaragua as the illiteracy rate was again approaching 50 percent due to several factors, including the civil war in the late 1980s, the continuing high dropout rates and increases in the population (Arnove, 1997, p. 83). The shift in priorities and financial resources continued in the direction of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that filled the void in services that were previously provided by the pre-neoliberal state. The emphasis of the Nicaraguan education ministry was on private institutions for service provision, and the IFIs gave their support as well as financial backing for such private initiatives in education.

A complete analysis of education nongovernmental organizations in the Nicaraguan context is beyond this essay, but for our purposes we will simply note the dramatic expansion of civil society that continued to encroach upon service provision in the wake of neoliberal reforms that reduced state welfare spending. The number of NGOs working in education in Latin America and the Caribbean more than doubled between 1985 and 1995, increasing from 71 to 125 (Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de La Educación [CIDE], 1996). Conflict in Nicaragua and other Central American countries in the decades previous to the neoliberal era resulted in regional interest on the part of the U.S. The result was that after falling in the mid to late 1970s, aid to Central America and the Caribbean grew dramatically from 12% of the U.S.'s entire development

assistance portfolio in 1980 to 20% by the mid 1980s (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 1994).

Civil society organizations of all types, sizes and ideologies became increasingly prevalent in all facets of daily life, including education. And while there certainly is a wide spectrum of viewpoints, through multiple overlapping processes of resource allocation and prioritizing those NGOs, both local and international, that adhere closest to the doctrine of their funder are privileged over others. In this context, then, they are those NGOs whose views are concordant with neoliberal education reforms. Certainly not all NGOs think and act similarly; they can fall on a wide range of ideologies and practices. But the notion that the industry as a whole is subject to outside influence through systems of external funding and privilege leaves little room for national influence reflected by national ideologies and approaches.

Crucial to the discussion of state reforms in Nicaragua in the last three decades is an analysis of their origins and the driving forces behind them. In the case of the neoliberal educational reforms in Nicaragua in the early 1990s there are two modes of thought. The first, best characterized by Juan Bautista Arríen (1991), contends that the Chamorro government did not begin with a plan for education that was "sufficiently well conceived or structured to put into effect" (p. 27). He contends that the education ministry looked outside the state to international institutions for ideas and guidelines on how to structure the educational system and its curriculum. And both efforts were every bit as politically and ideologically guided as the Sandinista efforts had been a decade earlier.

The second mode of thought, espoused by Robert F. Arnove (1994, p. 66-72), believes that Humberto Belli and other important officials in the education ministry entered the government with a reasonably coherent plan of how they wanted to reshape education. Belli was the author of a policy document entitled "Guidelines of the Ministry of Education of the Government of National Salvation," which was issued by the government in July, 1990. The paper contained a list of achievements in education by the previous administration such as extending education to marginalized populations and acquiring substantial international assistance for education as well as several failures. It argued that the Sandinistas had utilized education as tool of the state for socializing students towards a particular worldview while also attempting to normalize the values of socialism and communism in Nicaraguan society.

Though there were several factors, both internal and external, in Nicaragua's transition to a neoliberal model of education, international institutions played a central role in the process. Certainly some leaders in the education ministry, particularly Humberto Belli, were amenable to removing all Sandinista influence in the personnel, the structure and the pedagogy/curriculum in education. But it is also the case that loans from the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and USAID were offered under the strict condition that the education ministry implemented several neoliberal reforms to education. The new administration called for major curricular changes that included replacing every textbook at every level of education in the country. The operation described in the introduction would eventually import over seven million

textbooks at all grade levels in the span of only 10 months, the largest such operation in the history of USAID at that time (Arnove, 1994, p. 68-69).

The reforms were unquestionably top-down initiatives from the education ministry that were not reviewed or collaboratively designed by other branches of government. The ministry's decisions to emphasize local control of education and institute a fee system for students were not a response to demands from grassroots actors in Nicaragua, but rather they clearly emanated from the ministry itself (Gershberg, 1999b, p. 9). There is a direct correlation between the conditionalities placed on loans by World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank and the eventual reforms that were implemented. These included cutbacks in funding, greater emphasis on primary education, instituting a fee system in the secondary level and drastic reductions in adult basic and vocational education.

While a reasonable argument could be made that Sandinista educational reforms in the 1980s followed a somewhat similar process there is at least one crucial difference. Their reforms to education such as centralizing most curriculum and decision-making, implementing widespread literacy and adult basic education campaigns, etc. were not directly correlated to any external financial assistance. The neoliberal reforms of the 1990s gave the impression of an "democracy imposed from above" that while in some instances did provide substantive improvements to the decision-making process did not

originate from any demands in the local school system and were not extensively popular.[3]

The new education system of the 1990s suffered from many of the same issues that were used to critique education in the era of the Sandinistas. Just as then, education was being used as a tool of the state to promote a certain ideology. The new textbooks promoted a Western-centric, religious-oriented ideology that was not only instrumental in determining how students would view history and contemporary society, but more importantly how they would assess the proper role of the (neoliberal) state and the Church in society. The reforms had two goals: create the proper neoliberal education ministry, and second, support the processes that would normalize a neoliberal view of education, and the state in general, in Nicaraguan society. The strategy to rearrange the educational system was part of a larger project that attempted to create a neoliberal state in Nicaragua, complete with the values and customs in society that justified such a state. Key components of the project included reducing state sector employment through privatization, cutting subsidies for food, utilities and transportation, and devaluing the currency with an eye on reducing inflation (Babb, 2001, p. 113-116). The neoliberal adjustment program announced by the Minister of the Presidency Antonio Lacayo in 1991 was in part a response to the stipulations attached to loans from the IMF and other IFIs and also a reflection of the ideological beliefs of the incoming government (Stahler-Sholk, 1995).

[3] Dr. Juan Bautista Arríen, a Nicaraguan scholar and Director of the Institute of Education of the Universidad Centroamericana has argued that the reforms were not implement in response to the true pedagogical needs of an already active educational community (Gvirtz & Minvielle, 2009, p. 549).

The state of education in Nicaragua in the 21st century is one of continued deficiencies and inequalities. The educational sector affects and is affected by changes in the national economy, society, etc. In the 2002 scholastic year, 40 percent of school-aged children were not attending school, amounting to 1.1 million absent students of a potential 2.2 million children. Compounding the issue, an additional 30,000 students dropped out of school each year (Ceteno & Moreno, 2003). The educational sector was predominantly autonomous and managerial and pedagogical decisions had largely been transferred to the municipal governments. There was some conflict as to the role that the fee system played in education that made some teachers feel as if they were tax collectors.

Along with the new job functions, Nicaraguan teachers were also asked to modify their curriculum and pedagogy to fit with the state's ideology, and this process achieved varying levels of success. As Carlos Alberto Torres (1991) states, "teachers tend to retain their old values, beliefs, practices and professional behavior in spite of the short-term structural transformation that may have occurred" (p. 124). Beyond the assessments of teachers, fees for education gave some the impression that it had been converted from a right or a service provided by the government into a commodified good in a market system. As the director of one institute in Managua stated, "la educación estaba mercantilizada y no había una preocupación por la calidad de la educación del estudiante, sino por tener mayores ganancias" (Guevara, 2008b). The system was a source of conflict also for the way in which it exacerbated inequality between communities that

were more able to afford the fees and those who were not and therefore were unable to provide the same quality of education.

The educational system in Nicaragua is weighted heavily towards primary education, which is largely universal in Nicaragua and throughout Latin America where 92 percent of children begin primary school. But secondary education remains a serious deficiency as only 32 percent of primary students in the region eventually attend secondary school (Ramaswami, 2009, p. 36). Latin America has the highest proportion of workers with some primary school education in the world (Inter-American Development Bank [IADB], 1998). While the notion that emphasis should be placed on primary over secondary education has some merit, this view oftentimes comes from an economic perspective that views education as a commodity and seeks the greatest economic rate of return in any decision rather than the greatest benefit to society. There is a much larger problem taking place today when total spending on education in Latin America remains well below that of developed countries. Even more disconcerting are the inequalities in educational access across socioeconomic and racial divisions. In Nicaragua 70 percent of children from rich households attend secondary school, but only 14 percent of poor households do the same (OECD, 2008). These disparities are a result of multiple economic, political and social processes that make it difficult to pinpoint any single factor or influence and conversely any single panacean solution.

COMMUNITIES

San Marcos

San Marcos is a municipality located in the department of Carazo, approximately 45 kilometers south of the capital, Managua, on the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua. It has a population of 29,019 residents with 18,852, or 65%, located in the urban center of town and 10,167, or 35%, located in the surrounding communities.[4] An average home in San Marcos has 4.7 residents. Like other small communities around Managua, many San Marcos residents work in the capital during the day and return in the evening. Other common destinations for work include the department capitals, Jinotepe and Masaya. In total, 38% of the population works outside of the community. Employment in San Marcos is divided amongst the service sector, small commerce and agriculture. The high-altitude climate allows for cultivation of coffee and citrus fruits. Approximately 65% of the population has stable employment in some form, though it is difficult to determine what portions of this figure refer to the formal and informal sectors in census data. In terms of schooling, 23% of the population has either completed secondary school or has a university level education. San Marcos has a relatively small percentage of homes, 7.8%, that have a family member who has emigrated from Nicaragua.

[4] Unless otherwise noted, all geographic and socioeconomic data for San Marcos, Estelí and Bluefields comes from the most recent census, conducted by the national government in 2005 and published in 2006.

Estelí

Estelí is the capital of the department with the same name, located in the north central highlands on the Pacific side of the country. It is the third largest municipality in Nicaragua, with a population of 112,084 residents divided into 90,294, or 81%, located in the urban area and 21,790, or 19%, in the surrounding communities. An average home in Estelí has 4.6 residents. Employment around Estelí is heavily dominated by agriculture, specifically tobacco production but also cattle and rice. Similar to San Marcos, 67% of the population has stable employment, but due in part to the size and geographical isolation of Estelí, only 4.7% of those employed work outside of the community. In the 1970s, the town of Estelí and communities in the surrounding areas were active supporters of the Sandinista movement. It remained a Sandinista stronghold throughout the Contra War in the 1980s, and to this day continues to be a hotbed of political support for the party and President Ortega. In terms of education, Estelí is similar to San Marcos, with 23% of the population having finished secondary school or higher, though unlike San Marcos, nearly 20% of homes in Estelí have a family member who has emigrated from Nicaragua.

Bluefields

Bluefields is the departmental capital of the Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur (RAAS). It has a population of 45,547 residents, with 38,623, or 85%, located in the urban center and 6,924, or 15%, in the surrounding rural areas. An average home in Bluefields has 5 residents. The population is very diverse, primarily comprised of

Mestizo, Miskito and Creole peoples, with smaller communities of Sumu, Ramas and Garifuna. Accessible only by small boat from the city of El Rama or by commuter plane, Bluefields is the primary port on the Caribbean side of Nicaragua. The economy depends on exports of seafood, hardwood and other natural resources. Comparable to both San Marcos and Estelí, 65% of the population is stably employed, again with a difficult distinction between formal and informal work. Bluefields' size and geographical isolation make for a portion of the population (2.8%) that works outside of the community similar to that of Estelí. In educational terms, Bluefields is much like San Marcos and Estelí with 22% of the population having a secondary education or higher. About 12% of homes in Bluefields have someone who has emigrated from Nicaragua.

Bluefields is located on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, which is today divided into two autonomous regions, the RAAS and the the Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte (RAAN). The Coast has a long and very distinct history from the Pacific side of the country.[5] Originally part of the Miskito Kingdom, the independent territory was heavily influenced by the British who brought over slaves from Africa. After the Nicaraguan government annexed the entire region in 1894, the United States intervened and extended its agribusiness and resource industries. The Atlantic Coast was a site of strong resistance to the Sandinista revolutionary government in the 1980s, and after numerous negotiations and consultations it was granted autonomy through law and amendments to the new constitution ratified in 1987. Although Nicaragua was

[5] A full history of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua and its peoples are beyond the scope of this paper. For more thorough analysis see Hale (1994), Gordon (1995), Hooker (2010) and Baracco (2011).

recognized as a multiethnic, multilingual state and the legislation incorporated several demands of peoples on the Atlantic Coast, the autonomy law did not extend full political autonomy to the region. The central government retained full control over foreign relations, national defense and natural resources in the regions. Contemporary RAAN and RAAS have a limited regional autonomy while cultural and geographical barriers persist. Both major political parties from the Pacific Coast have a limited though active presence in Bluefields and the region at large, in part as a result of alliances with local political groups.

CURRENT REFORMS

With the election of Daniel Ortega and the Sandinista party in 2006 came yet another round of significant changes in the Nicaraguan educational system. The incoming Education Minister, Miguel De Castilla, immediately declared an end to the Autonomous Schools Program and abolished all fees for primary and secondary education. This was not unexpected as he was a staunch opponent of autonomy in Nicaraguan schools from the early 1990s, having once stated that the neoliberal model of education "*había convertido las escuelas en pulperías* (had converted the schools into local stores)" (Guevara, 2008a; De Castilla, 2006). At the same time, De Castilla also commended the creation of school councils and lauded the value of participation from all actors- administration, educators and parents- in making communal decisions. They would form an integral part of the ministry's initiative to form national, regional and municipal councils made up of parents, teachers, ministry staff, NGOs and community

leaders to collectively assess the entire educational system and discuss potential solutions. Councils were formed and convened on a monthly basis from January to November in 2007, and final summaries and conclusions were passed up to the educational ministry.

Several other initiatives were initially implemented during the 2007 academic year, and they continue to this day. Uncertified teachers, roughly 50 percent of the nation's educators, were to receive training and work toward accreditation (Sirias, 2007a). This process has occurred slower than expected due in part to insufficient funds for teacher training and the uneven application of the directive. In some cases, teachers with decades of experience and personal connections to the school director or local officials have been allowed to continue teaching, or at worst, were reassigned to an area elementary school. This level of local control is antithetical to the new strategy of the Education Ministry, which is centered on moving the decision-making process back into the ministry while allowing for input from school staff. In terms of other initiatives, the incoming Sandinista government announced the immediate reinstatement of the adult literacy campaign from the early 1980s that would be administered by the secondary schools. The new initiative, known either by its new name, *De Martí a Fidel,* or the classic *Yo Sí Puedo,* has again relied on secondary students to teach reading and writing in rural areas as part of school curriculum, and according to government figures, which are admittedly suspect, has reduced the illiteracy rate substantially (Arríen, 2009). The literacy curriculum was translated into the Miskito language in 2008 for implementation on the Caribbean Coast (Guevara, 2008c).

In addition to the community councils, new policies and literacy program, the Education Ministry forcefully replaced the vast majority of elementary and secondary school directors, as well as all regional and municipal ministry delegates. As had occurred in the early 1980s and again in the early 1990s, the nearly wholesale transition to new personnel was more about political affiliation than experience or expertise. While it is true that politics was a central factor, particularly in cases where the Sandinista-affiliated teachers' union, ANDEN, exercised undue influence in the decision-making process, the new changes also represented something more. They were additionally a reflection of local power dynamics and the networks of social capital built around connections in local government and business. In the case of secondary schools in San Marcos, the two previous school directors who had been supporters of the *Partido Liberal Constitucionalista* (PLC) were replaced with teachers who were longtime members of the FSLN *and* had familial ties to people working in the mayor's office of San Marcos. A new school director in Estelí owned two local businesses, and along with her siblings, had developed an extensive network of connections in the community. The same process occurred with all municipal and departmental delegates who were removed from office and replaced according to political, as well as social and economic criteria.

A central part of the education reforms centered on the new teaching techniques, classroom procedures and school policies that had long been a major focus of the research and writing of the new Education Minister, De Castilla. He immediately announced new initiatives for more active teaching methods that sought to minimize the traditional "banking" model of education denounced by Paulo Freire (2000) and instead

promote a more dynamic, conversational approach that focused on group activities and classroom presentations. This was not entirely new in Nicaragua since teachers and education ministry officials had expressed interest in making education more dynamic since at least the 1980s. But De Castilla's efforts to promote new teaching approaches were much more prevalent in the Ministry's published materials than prior initiatives. Schools directors and ministry delegates were instructed to place emphasis on the change in classroom pedagogy at the monthly teacher meetings, *Talleres de Evaluación, Programación y Capacitación Educativa* (TEPCE) (Workshops for Educational Evaluation, Programming and Training). The TEPCE are mandatory for all teachers, and they begin with a prayer followed by a radio message from De Castilla himself before the teachers separate into groups by subject area to evaluate the previous month and plan activities for upcoming classes.

In addition to promoting dynamic teaching approaches, the TEPCE also provided an opportunity for the school directors to reinforce other key ministry directives. To accommodate increases in group assignments and presentations the Ministry announced an end to individual monthly exams. Instead, 60 percent of students' grades would come from points accumulated in classroom assignments and 40 percent from very short, infrequent quizzes. The idea behind the change was to ensure that any student who at least completed the activities and participated during the class would be assured of the minimum passing grade. These rules and others were not enforced uniformly across the country, and levels of compliance varied by region and municipality, and even within the school itself as different teachers took different approaches to the changes. For example,

one of the lesser ministry directives involved discouraging teachers from assigning homework outside class time that would require the use of the Internet or textbooks from the school library. To date, this has not become a national policy, and enforcement has been so inconsistent that it is currently only a suggested guideline. The Education Ministry has also promoted a new initiative to give teachers more freedom in structuring their class time. According to the new rules, 70 percent of instruction hours would come from the standard national curriculum and in the remaining 30 percent of the time teachers could modify, adapt and add to the curriculum based on their regional social and economic context. Application of the 70/30 rule, as it is known in many schools, is also non uniform across the country, as different teachers, schools and regions have taken different approaches to the material taught in the classroom.

Another component of the reform process involved a continuation of earlier efforts to replace the secondary school curriculum with newer materials, concepts and ideas. The compendiums for all classes released across the country in 2003 and 2004 were filled with weekly step-by-step lessons with key points and targeted goals for the entire year, causing many teachers to nickname them *adoquines*, or cobblestones. In early 2007, De Castilla announced a complete redesign of school curriculum with input from the municipal and regional councils. The curricular reforms were part of the Ministry's attempt to openly incorporate more values in education as a part of the initiative De Castilla called, "*La Cruzada Nacional de Moralización de la Escuela Pública*" (The National Crusade for Moralization in the Public Schools) (Brenes, 2007). In addition to the new teaching materials, the Ministry initiated a program entitled

Programa Pro Valores that consisted of sets of around five values that were to be incorporated into all classes each month (Gil, 2009). Sample values included those related to health, the environment, family relationships and national pride. In order to coincide with the anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution on July 19th, 1979 the values for the month of July included independence, sovereignty, nationalism and autonomy.

New manuals and guidebooks were released to pilot schools beginning in 2008 and 2009, and they were sent to all secondary schools across the country before the 2010 academic year. The manuals, which were renamed from compendiums to programs, have nearly identical content as their predecessors. What little new material there was included references to cooperation between Nicaragua and other countries, specifically Venezuela and the economic and political alliance known as the *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (ALBA). Additionally, sections were added to a few classes to describe the purpose and functions of the *Consejos de Poder Ciudadano* (CPC) (Councils of Citizen Power), neighborhood organizations charged with making communal decisions. While technically anyone can join one of the Councils, the majority of CPCs are lead by members of the Sandinista Party. In most classes only the initial section with a letter from De Castilla as well as a few notes on the role of the teacher were added to the new edition, while the content remained unchanged save for minor edits to order and structure. This was not lost on educators from any of the three communities. In most instances the changes centered on the order of the lessons, rather than the contents themselves.

The absence of substantive modifications to the teaching materials handed down from the previously implemented reforms is indicative of a larger trend. In several cases, the reforms called for and attempted by De Castilla were very similar to those called for by the previous education minister. Miguel Angel Garcia had previously ordered the phasing out of teachers without college diplomas, stating that they would no longer hire uncertified teachers after the 2005 academic year (Pérez, 2005). The effort was promoted heavily throughout the ministry at the level of discourse, but in practice implementation was sporadic and subject to the decisions of school directors. The Education Ministry under Garcia diverged from previous administrations in promoting and participating in large-scale literacy campaign similar to the national campaign of the 1980s (Navas, 2006). The campaign was exclusively on the Pacific Coast and had limited support from ANDEN and Sandinista-affiliated civil society groups, but it still managed to produce results on a level not seen since the 1980s. Another central component of the current reform efforts, new teaching techniques and procedures, was also part of Garcia's changes in 2004 when the ministry instituted a series of nation-wide teacher training sessions and developed new manuals for secondary schools dedicated exclusively to training future teachers (Pérez, 2004).

As the largest and most politically connected teachers union in the country, ANDEN, has played a special role in Nicaragua's educational system over the last decade. The organization was a vocal opponent of nearly every initiative of the education ministry under Garcia, criticizing either the content, the approach, or both, of new programs as well as the historically low teacher salaries (Castillo Zeas, 2000;

González & Pérez, 2003; Navas, 2005a; Navas, 2005b; Pérez, 2004; Pérez, 2005). Protests and strikes coordinated by teachers affiliated with ANDEN were a common occurrence during every school year from 2000 until 2007. While they did not entirely dissipate with the election of Daniel Ortega, both their frequency and severity significantly diminished. Several teachers cited this inconsistency as the cause of their frustration with the politicization of their struggles for better working conditions and higher salaries. ANDEN's primary competitor, the *Unidad Sindical Magisterial*, is another teachers union that is closely aligned to the PLC and other conservative political parties. The union has been responsible for several large-scale and numerous smaller protests since 2007 (Guevara, 2011; Sirias & Olivas, 2007), but with far fewer teachers and little support in rural areas, it does not have near the same force as ANDEN.

Mass media in Nicaragua plays a fundamental role in national affairs and in the formation of public opinion.[6] The television, newspaper, and to a lesser extent radio, industries are all dominated by relatively small conglomerates of wealthy economic interests. The two major national daily newspapers, *La Prensa* and *El Nuevo Diario,* are owned by members of the Chamorro family. Founded in 1926, *La Prensa* is the country's oldest and most established newspaper, and it was a strong opponent of the Sandinista government in the 1980s. *El Nuevo Diario* was founded in 1980 to counter the anti-Sandinista coverage of *La Prensa,* and it remained a pro-Sandinista newspaper throughout most of the 1980s and 1990s, though it has become increasingly critical of the

[6] A complete analysis of the mass media in Nicaragua is beyond the scope of this paper. For more information on contemporary media in Nicaragua and its treatment of several topics see Rothschuh (2010) and Rothschuh (2011).

party and its leaders since then. Today, despite their distinct origins and differing political philosophies, both newspapers are routinely critical of the educational system and its administration (Sirias & Brenes, 2007; Pineda, 2010; Bermúdez, 2010; Bermúdez, 2011). While *El Nuevo Diario* is slightly more sympathetic to the current Sandinista government than *La Prensa*, both newspapers regularly question the validity of statistical claims made by Education Ministry officials in everything from student matriculation numbers to grade completion rates. This problem is in large part self-inflicted as credible statistics and their verification have been historically difficult to produce for all state institutions in Nicaragua. But the nearly continuous negative press and impugning of the data, abilities and motives of Education Ministry personnel serves to call into serious question in the eyes of the general public the credibility of the educational system itself and its ability to function.

Broadcast media sources in Nicaragua such as television and radio offer a significant contrast to print media in terms of ideological diversity. In a country where many cannot afford the cost of a daily newspaper or cable television, radio serves as a prominent mode of communication and disseminator of news and information. Local and national radio stations of all political persuasions are nearly ubiquitous in the country, especially in the rural areas. There are only a handful of television stations that broadcast to the entire country, two of which are owned by economic interests with close ties to the Sandinista Party. The few independent stations are owned by a small conglomerate of powerful economic interests connected to the country's conservative establishment. Coverage of the educational system in television and radio is largely divided along

political lines. Sandinista or Sandinista-affiliated sources are generally positive about the efforts and results of the Education Ministry during Sandinista administrations and almost universally negative when the opposition controls the state. Conversely, the conservative, in many cases PLC-affiliated, sources generally presented a positive portrayal of the educational system during the Violeta Chamorro and subsequent PLC administrations and an unflinchingly negative depiction of the Education Ministry during Sandinista governments.

Chapter Three: Responses to Current Reforms

TEACHERS

Politics as Usual

Teacher perceptions of Nicaragua's educational system reflect a broad array of viewpoints and analysis that can hardly be summarized into a single account. Nevertheless, several common general ideas and themes emerge from the interviews. Educators in all three communities share a relatively clear understanding of the educational system and the environment in which it operates, though their analysis of the past and present and/or prescriptions for the future do quite often differ. Above all else, it is clear that neither process of resistance or acquiescence is complete as all teachers are able to differentiate those aspects of the educational system that they approve of or support from those that they do not. Positive reception of certain ministry initiatives does not ensure blanket acceptance of all of them and vice versa. To cite just one example, several teachers in Bluefields openly approve of the ministry's goal to inculcate more values in education while simultaneously expressing disapproval of the new teaching materials that have hardly changed and continue to attach little importance to the history and culture of the Atlantic Coast. All teachers demonstrated an ability to maintain dichotomous viewpoints about many topics related to the educational system and the environment in which it operates, taking positions that were as multifaceted as the issues surrounding their work and workplace.

Teachers in San Marcos, Estelí and Bluefields all share in the consensus belief that schools are in no way immune from political influence. They repeatedly pointed out that education, like all other institutions in Nicaragua, is highly politicized, and as one male teacher in San Marcos put it, "In education you can always find the ideology of the government, regardless of party." Another male teacher in Estelí noted that "Even within the same politicized institutions you will find divisions between party members that prevent them from coming to an agreement." The mere idea that politics pervades everything from personnel decisions to classroom management to content in educational materials is enough to wrest esteem and recognition from the institution of education as a whole.

Even teachers who openly expressed support for either of the two major political parties, PLC and FSLN, acknowledged it is unfortunate that politicization negatively affects the perceptions of all Nicaraguans towards their educational system. But there is also the tacit assumption that it has always been this way and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. "I know that if the other party [PLC] wins the next elections in 2011 there will be another transformation not in service of the needs of the community but rather in the service of a political party," stated one female teacher from Bluefields. Another male teacher from San Marcos is equally pessimistic about the future, noting that, "Here in Nicaragua we are very revengeful between political parties and ideologies. It has always been that way and it probably always will."

The extent to which teachers' political beliefs affect their personal ideologies and their actions, whether through self-censorship or false compliance, is difficult to

ascertain. Though Nicaraguan society is deeply partisan, with two strongly opposed ideologies dominating the political arena, most peoples' personal politics fall on a continuum ranging from party enthusiasts to those who are only halfheartedly involved to those who are completely apolitical. Politics subtly crept to the fore in teachers' descriptions of the Education Ministry itself and the reform efforts of the new minister, De Castilla. In several instances, teachers in Estelí and San Marcos (Bluefields teachers were almost uniformly apolitical in their analysis) who were openly sympathetic to the Sandinista government used language that came almost verbatim from ministry speeches, initiatives and new programs that were part of the most recent iteration of reform. It is noteworthy that while these teachers were quick to use discourse similar to that coming from the head of the ministry they were not as easily influenced in their behaviors and actions. Indeed, some of them were the most fervent resistors to some of the new daily protocols and pedagogical guidelines that contradicted their teaching styles.

Towards the end my fieldwork I was asked by my former colleagues to attend a meeting of the ANDEN teachers union in San Marcos. The meeting was led by the municipal representative of the union and discussion items on the agenda included the new teacher salary proposal from the Ministry, plans for how ANDEN could participate in a local secondary school's anniversary celebration and one group exercise to talk about approaches to education in other Central American countries. The meeting was attended by approximately two dozen teachers from the three secondary schools (two public and one private) in San Marcos. One of the participants was the previous director of the largest secondary school in San Marcos who had been removed in 2006 because he was

an active supporter of the PLC party in the 1990s. This man had been the director during my first two year teaching at his school, and though I had closer ties with several teachers and administration staff, he and I had a very amicable professional relationship. After his dismissal, he was immediately rehired at the same school to teach math and science.

Due in part to the fact that he had been a leader in the community for decades and his close personal ties to many teachers at the school, he was allowed to attend and participate in ANDEN meetings. In this particular meeting, he expressed strong frustration with his fellow teachers who refused to strike over the miniscule pay raises being offered by the current Education Ministry as they had routinely done under the previous liberal government. Several of these teachers later expressed to me in private that they agreed there was a double standard but felt defenseless against more powerful national forces. The political partisans constituted a minority of voices, though, as the majority of teachers expressed feelings of disenchantment and consternation at what they feel are seemingly endless attempts to reform the educational system along strictly ideological lines with little consideration for resources.

In contrast to teachers in Estelí and San Marcos on the Pacific Coast, teachers in Bluefields were careful to make the distinction between the political machinations taking place in Managua between the two major political parties and how the educational sector operates on the Caribbean Coast. One male teacher notes that "Yes, the national educational system is constantly changing. It is not something that is static. Right now the educational system in Nicaragua as a whole is very unstable. But here on the Atlantic Coast our education is pretty constant. Here there are fewer changes."

Several teachers were quick to point out that while personnel changes in what are called *puestos de confianza,* or positions of trust, like those that are nearly universal on the Pacific Coast are a part of life in Bluefields, they are far more infrequent and usually occur with the consent of the school director or ministry delegate. The Caribbean Coast is not immune to national politics, as both major parties have a presence in the larger communities. But their influence is at least in part a result of alliances forged with local political parties and civil society organizations that are largely independent of national politics. The resulting pattern of power relations is therefore more concerned with local networks and considerably insulated from political intimidation. As one female teacher in Bluefields states, "Each government in Managua, each new education minister, comes with their own educational policy tied to their political beliefs, but we have to adapt them to our local conditions."

Reform and its Socio-Cultural Effects

Educational reform in Nicaragua is perceived as both a direct consequence of the political nature of society and the deficiency of the system itself. The Ministry of Education, like other state institutions, is not immune to the winds of political change, and teachers in all three communities are cognizant of this fact. But their perceptions of these reform efforts are that they are generally very superficial rarely lead to profound changes in practice. With regards to the teacher manuals and class guides, one male teacher in San Marcos expressed the feelings of many when he stated, "In my opinion, they have not changed absolutely anything. Only the names of a few topics or the titles

of a few sections here and there have been slightly changed but nothing else." His male colleague in San Marcos concurred, noting that "If the changes amount to 10 percent of the content, it is a lot. Ninety percent [of the teacher textbooks] is the exact same."

Teachers were quick to point out that the few changes in the new teaching materials generally amount to a new letter from the incoming Education Minister and a few notes about education and the role of the teacher in Nicaragua that inevitably reference the ideology of the political party in power. As one female teacher in Bluefields stated, "If the transformation for them is to put their own slogan and logo to identity their political party on the educational texts, then that is the only transformation there is. Beyond that, everything else in the content remains the same."

Teacher after teacher was adamant in the interviews that it is possible, and in some cases even preferable, to teach their classes with older textbooks and teacher guides because the content is very similar to the current materials. In many cases, there are slight adjustments to the order in which the material is taught, but the content remains the same. It is common for the Education Ministry to announce new curriculum months and even years before it is finally provided to the teachers, with schools in the rural communities the last ones to receive it. The quote below from a teacher in Bluefields reflects the frustration of many teachers as a result of the constant replacement of teaching materials with similar content.

> Sometimes the reform process is so long that one government will begin modifying the teaching materials, another government will assume power and change the reforms, and the [revised] teaching materials from the first government

> have not even arrived yet. And this leaves teachers up in the air, looking anywhere they can for their own information. It is particularly difficult for the teachers in the rural areas (male teacher in Estelí, personal communication, July, 2010).

One teacher in San Marcos had collected the teaching programs and guides in his classes of geography and history from the last three administrations going back to 1996. He enjoyed demonstrating how material from any single manual could generally be found almost unchanged, save for a slightly different heading or title, in the other manuals within around five pages of the page in the original manual. Another teacher in Estelí tells a similar story about all of the money spent on replacing teaching materials.

> During the government of Bolaños [2002-2007] there was a change of curriculum and they printed a seemingly infinite amount of guides and textbooks, and then later the current government comes into power and they repeat the process over again. So there is an enormous amount of books and manuals in the Ministry's storage, but they still invest almost nothing in teacher training and school buildings. They are committing a big mistake (male teacher in Estelí, personal communication, July 2010).

In their estimation, the Ministry has produced thousands of unused manuals in the last three decades while it continues to underfund aspects of education such as teacher salaries, school facilities and teacher training that may less lend themselves to ideological posturing.

The issues of national curriculum and curricular reforms are of particular importance to teachers on the Atlantic Coast. The region's history, culture and peoples have historically been undervalued and overlooked in the standardized curriculum issued by the Education Ministry in Managua. Despite the regional autonomy granted through law and amendments to the 1987 Constitution, secondary schools on the Coast are required by the government to begin with the national curriculum, after which they are free to add their own materials as they see fit. The regular exclusion of information about the region in social studies curricular materials is partly responsible for the strong criticism from many of the teachers in Bluefields. One male teacher stated flatly that "The curriculum is not forced. You don't have to comply with it. It's just a guide." Nearly every teacher in Bluefields mentioned the exclusion of the *Costeña* history and culture, and several noted that the students were aware of their absence.

> We've always tried to incorporate the local material into the national curriculum. Many teachers say 'why talk about the independence of Nicaragua on this side if the [Caribbean] Coast had absolutely nothing to do with independence?' We were never under the control of the Spanish at any time. But when the Coast became a part of Nicaragua, at the national level, we all kind of became Nicaraguans. And the students tell us that our day to march should be the day to recognize autonomy in the Atlantic Coast. We march on Independence Day but there are also marches on the day of autonomy (female teacher in Bluefields, personal communication, August, 2010).

In their estimation this can cause students to become disinterested in school and can negatively affect their academic performance.

Several of the schools that I visited created exhibits for the monthly set of values and concepts as part of the Pro Valores program. These were commonly displayed in the civics education classrooms or a public location such as the school entrance or administration office. The secondary school in Estelí featured the largest display with extensive information about the definitions and history of the values for the month of July. In the case of two secondary schools in Bluefields, I observed exhibits with the history of the Nicaragua's independence from Spain in 1821 but there were no similar displays of information regarding important events in the history of the Caribbean Coast. Teachers expressed strong interest in favor of incorporating more history of the Coast and its peoples, but they also acknowledged the challenges inherent to adding new material due to the lack of class time and need to fully cover the history curriculum distributed by the Education Ministry. The problem of exclusion is not limited to history and culture.

Teachers in Bluefields consistently noted that in addition to leaving out the history and the culture the national curriculum also commonly disregards the social and economic realities for people living on the Atlantic Coast. As one male teacher said, "A curriculum must be pertinent to the sociolinguistic reality of the Caribbean Coast, but that is not what we see from the Ministry." In cases where there are substantial differences between regions, such as natural resources or

local government institutions, the standard curriculum typically only refers to information from the Pacific Coast. Additionally, educational reforms have historically minimized the linguistic differences between the Spanish-speaking Pacific Coast and the various indigenous communities on the Atlantic Coast that speak Miskito, Sumo, Rama or Creole English, in addition to Spanish. The national curriculum is entirely in Spanish, though teachers are permitted to incorporate additional instruction in the native language of the students. These extensions and adjustments to the curriculum, so commonplace in the region, are oftentimes the most valued aspects of education in the community.

Far more than teachers in either San Marcos or Estelí, teacher in Bluefields regularly cited the policy that 70 percent of curriculum must come from the standardized national textbooks while the remaining 30 percent may consist of adjustments to the curriculum that incorporate geographically and culturally specific information. Nearly every teacher cited their ability to make adjustments as a way to make classes more interesting and more pertinent to the students' everyday lives. This scenario contrasts with the opinions of the majority of teachers in San Marcos and Estelí who feel the national curriculum needs little to no adjustment in order to be adequate for their classes.

> In 2003, we developed a curriculum for all five years of high school and obviously we included lots of information about the Atlantic Coast, always starting with the national curriculum and modifying it. And what we developed was used in classrooms in Bluefields and it was accepted by the Ministry's

> regional delegate. The only problem is that our material was never incorporated into the national curriculum (female teacher in Bluefields, personal communication, August, 2010).

Frustration is the general sentiment of most teachers in Bluefields who face the perennial task of adapting the curriculum to their local environment only to repeat the process with each round of educational reforms. Several teachers noted how the constant reform efforts that promise to revise and update the national curriculum have gone unnoticed by their students because the content of most teaching materials remains virtually intact from one year to the next.

Teacher preparation and training courses are often cited by the teachers as crucial elements to quality education that are routinely ignored by the Ministry's reform efforts. Teachers are adamant about the need for training, especially in a system in which many of those in the classroom never finished their degree at the university. As one Bluefields teacher said:

> They have carried out some small reforms, it is true, but we are not prepared for those changes. Because from one day to the next they tell us that there will be a change in the curriculum, but we were never trained on how to teach the new texts (female teacher in Bluefields, personal communication, August, 2010).

The Education Ministry, and especially De Castilla, has placed particular emphasis on pedagogical reforms, but teachers are insistent about the insufficient training to implement a new teaching style in the classroom. Lack of training is not isolated to the most recent reforms, and teachers consistently cited the lack of preparation in all of the

educational reform campaigns over the last two decades. Though training is ostensibly one of the key purposes of the monthly TEPCEs, teachers stated that rarely, if ever, is time in the monthly meetings spent on training them on new teaching methods. The potential explanations for the lack of training in TEPCEs ranged from lack of time due to long hours spent sharing experiences from the last month and lesson planning for the upcoming weeks to insufficient funds for instruction classroom techniques.

The socio-cultural effects of the constant attempts at educational reform, particularly on the teachers who are, in general, cognizant of the type and scope of the changes implemented by the Ministry, are in many ways more important than the actual reforms themselves. In general, whether they are sympathetic or not to the stated goals of the Education Minister or the political party in control of the government is less of a factor than the teachers' negative opinion of the *perception* of constant reform. As one female teacher in Bluefields who is openly sympathetic to the current Sandinista government put it, "The educational system has varied substantially, but the changes that have occurred have not been to improve the quality of education." Granted that being a Sandinista supporter on the Atlantic Coast implies something very different from being a Sandinista in western Nicaragua, this comment illustrates the separation that many teachers make between the stated ideologies of political parties and the consequences of numerous attempts to change the educational system. One fallacy common to many analyses of Nicaraguan state institutions is to presume ideological homogeneity along political lines. But inside of the education system many teachers acknowledge that differences *within* parties lead to more changes, as evidenced by the male teacher in

Estelí who said, "In Nicaragua the truth is that all institutions are politicized, but even within institutions controlled by one party there are strong divisions, and many times they never reach an agreement about what to do."

The overarching message is that concerns over instability caused by frequent personnel changes and surface reforms supersede issues of politics. The discord between publicly stated goals and initiatives and the speed with which they are undertaken has an effect on teacher who are well-accustomed to the discourse of reform. The story from one teacher in Estelí illustrates this point.

> The curriculum changes have somehow incurred creating instability in our educational system. Changes to the curriculum are promoted in the media and then applied initially only to two or three schools. They spend years making changes and only these two or three institutions are applying the transformation. Only after a long period of time are the changes applied to everyone on a national level, and in some cases the President or Minister of Education have been removed from office (male teacher in Estelí, personal communication, July 2010).

The common refrain from teachers is that the educational system has become one underfunded experiment in reform after another. Most reforms stem from the ideology of the Education Minister or the political party in control of the state. "Education in Nicaragua responds directly to the interests of the class in power," stated one male teacher in San Marcos. One exasperated teacher in Estelí noted that for him, "The educational system becomes a guinea pig for experiments with different educational theories." The social and cultural effects of educational reform are certainly very

powerful within the institution, but they and the perception of the system as a whole also strongly influence the environment around schools.

Local Responses

Teachers in all three communities framed their responses using language, symbols and examples that reflected the cultural and historical particularities of their location. Teachers in Estelí frequently cited the town's revolutionary past, highlighting the prominent role that it played in resistance to domination. Nearly independent of their gender, race or class, they commonly used language and symbols evocative of the Sandinista Party and its discourse. Interestingly, this was also the case for several teachers who were clearly not party sympathizers but still resorted to using many of the same features of the dominant language in the community. A few male teachers in Estelí noted the large military base in town, located prominently on the major highway, as an example of discipline and structure that is missing in Nicaraguan secondary schools. Conversely, teachers in San Marcos used far fewer references to the region's role in the revolution during the 1970s and 1980s. The language used in interviews was less overtly political than that of the teachers in Estelí. Several teachers made reference to San Marcos' proximity to Managua, the capital city, as part of their explanations for why schooling in San Marcos needed to modernize in order to help create a more developed economy.

The interviews conducted in Bluefields exhibited entirely different stylistic and content characteristics than either Estelí or San Marcos on the Pacific Coast. Teachers in

Bluefields commonly made reference to the history of the Caribbean Coast, focusing on the centuries-long affinity with England and the United States, as well as their struggle for autonomy from what they feel are oppressive state and economic influences coming from the Pacific Coast. Virtually all of them expressed feelings of being ignored, underrepresented, and isolated by the Nicaraguan state, and these feelings were essential to their ideologies that contrasted sharply with those of teachers in Estelí and San Marcos. The regional characteristics of Estelí, San Marcos and Bluefields were important in contextualizing how teachers framed their responses and the language, references and cultural symbols that they used.

Weapons of the Weak and Social Capital

Amidst the distinctions between teachers stemming from locations, there are multiple place-based processes occurring in each school that work to condition the teachers' responses and actions. In all three communities, there are teachers who actively decide to not follow particular initiatives or instructions from the Education Ministry that come by way of either the school director or the regional ministry delegate. These small acts of resistance are utilized more often by teachers who possess some form of social or cultural capital in the community that affords them a level of autonomy vis-à-vis the school director. For example, a few teachers in San Marcos expressed their dissatisfaction with the ministry directive to eliminate all tests in their class and had decided to administer "*pruebacitas"* (short quizzes) instead. These teachers evinced very little fear of punishment from the school director as a result of their close personal

relationships with other teachers and ministry staff in the region that they had developed over decades as educators. Another teacher who had family ties to relatives of the new school director was comfortable teaching her class in her own style, rather than adopting the new pedagogy that was to become the norm in the classroom. Her social connections afforded her the freedom to respond in the manner she wished.

In the case of Estelí, one teacher expressed frustration with the new mandatory monthly meetings. He stated that he routinely arrives very late or not at all and this was not a source of contention between him and the regional ministry delegate because he had been friends since childhood with a few people on the city council who were powerful in the community. Another teacher in Estelí was very forthright in her support of the Sandinista Party and the school director, who was also a Sandinista, but she was not in agreement with the new teacher manuals that were intentionally light on information for the purposes of ending the classic banking model of education that is systemic in Nicaragua. She simply used her own materials and conducted the class in the same manner that she had been doing for years. During the interview she mentioned how she had a side business, and for her it was less about the supplemental income, though that was certainly beneficial, than about her prominent status in the community as a well-known businessperson. This same teacher acknowledged that when people from outside the community, including the Education Ministry, challenged any teachers at her school she would defend them because that was the custom at her school. "Independent of my personal ideology or the ideology of the teacher, I am going to defend them because we are colleagues, neighbors and ultimately friends."

The small-scale acts of everyday resistance by teachers in Bluefields were different in form than those in San Marcos and Estelí, and they were rationalized in very different ways by teachers who shared a common identity built around centuries of resistance to intrusion from the national government. Several teachers offered strong criticism of the nationally standardized curriculum that lacks consideration of the Caribbean Coast's history or culture, outside of a few common folklore stereotypes. In the close-knit, relatively isolated community of Bluefields where social capital is relatively widespread, it was the cultural capital exhibited by the teachers that really influenced the manner and the extent to which they chose to resist. As one male teacher noted, "We do try to make small adjustments but hopefully without creating awareness in Managua, that yes, we are doing the changes." Teachers who had the means to acquire their own materials and the ability to conduct research using alternative sources such as the Internet, information collections at several NGOs in and around Bluefields, and oral knowledges were best equipped to resist the new national curriculum coming from the Pacific Coast.

Many of the educational reforms have had effects beyond the classroom, and several of the pedagogical changes have been met with resistance. In a telling anecdote of the challenges inherent to reforms, one teacher in San Marcos assigned his students homework that required them to search for information in textbooks and the Internet and present their findings to the class, against the protocols established by the school director. This type of assignment also contradicts the classic banking model of education in Nicaragua. As he stated, "Parents immediately complained to the school director, saying

the role of the teacher was to stand in front of the class and tell the students what they need to know. Many parents are aware that the education they want is the traditional model. So now I am fighting with my boss, with the parents, *solito* (all by myself). I am trying to do what the Ministry wants, but this type of response discourages a person."

This episode is illustrative of two important points. Reforms to education go well beyond the classroom and potentially illicit responses from other actors in society. And more importantly, local power relations are instrumental in conditioning teachers' actions as they must simultaneously process what they hear from the Ministry and navigate their immediate surroundings. Contrast the situation in San Marcos to that of Bluefields where teachers more frequently disagree with Ministry policy and generally have more freedom to teach in the way they see fit. As one male teacher stated, "If we make some adjustments there [in the monthly TEPCE] then the directors know, but then it's like very, very rare that they stop our changes."

Environment Around Education

In general, teachers in all three communities expressed a clear understanding of the environment within which education is situated in Nicaragua. The lack of adequate salaries, teaching materials and school facilities has come to be accepted and internalized as a normal aspect of life. This is important because these factors are so taken for granted that they almost drop out of the equation when teachers discuss potential ways to improve education in Nicaragua. Teachers in all three communities were more apt to cite changes in attitudes and classroom discipline, instead of increased funding, as necessary for

improving education. A significant reason for this is the strong pervasiveness of Escobar's development discourse in teacher's descriptions of Nicaraguan society.

The fact that Nicaragua is portrayed as an underdeveloped country and many teachers have come to internalize this portrayal allows for it to stand in as a rationale or explanation for many of the problems that beset education. During the interviews, every teacher located Nicaragua within the developed/developing dichotomy, indicating its importance in their positionalities. Along similar lines, teachers regularly cited various influences of the development institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and numerous NGOs working in education. Most expressed the opinion that development is a goal to be achieved through improved material conditions though few were able to offer concrete steps to accomplish it.

Teachers were very clear about the neoliberal forms of education in Nicaragua that persisted despite the change in government in 2007. Whether they were sympathetic or not to the ideas of the current educational reform process, they were very cognizant of the fact that spending levels on education have not appreciably changed from the neoliberal era. Some teachers cited the global economic crisis as the reason for this, while others faulted the state. Only one teacher, a man in San Marcos with high social and cultural capital, attributed much of the blame to development institutions and their position on restricting social spending. Teachers in Bluefields noted the fallacy of local autonomy for education under both the neoliberal and current Sandinista administrations in the face of nationally standardized curriculum that contained very little information

about the Atlantic Coast. Like their counterparts in Estelí and San Marcos, they were well aware of the matrix of national and international forces that played a direct part in structuring education in Nicaragua. But it was the local context of social relations that determined their behaviors and actions in the last instance.

Analysis of comments from several teachers illustrates their collective understanding of how the state and society operate in Nicaragua, and the place of education within that system. As one teacher puts it, "The quality of education does not depend solely on the educational system itself, in the books, in the teachers, etc., but it also will depend on the entire environment in which it operates." Several teachers spoke of the important role played by parents and their families in the education of their children. In addition to the difficulties involved with new teaching techniques, there are questions surrounding the effectiveness of promoting certain values or ideas that run counter to those found in the home.

> I see things from this point of view. The Ministry of Education may have every intention to improve the values of students, but what about the parents? So, we are in an environment where the education system is in place but we are forgetting that within the education system it is absolutely necessary and indispensable the support of the parents. We need to integrate the whole society, not just the ministry but all institutions of society (male teacher in Estelí, personal communication, July 2010).

Teachers like this one in Estelí are clear that while many parents value education there are others that for whatever reason, either for economic hardship or they might have

left school early themselves or something else, may see the need to emphasize other options such as looking for work or helping with the family business over school. Families were not the only social institution mentioned as several teachers noted the influence of mass media such as newspapers, television news and radio programs. Teachers acknowledged that, with the exception of Sandinista-run media outlets, most information sources are overwhelming negative in their portrayal of the educational system and those in charge. The general consensus is that information sources like these and the Internet are more powerful than the educational system in normalizing certain values and ideas in Nicaraguan society.

In addition to assessments on the role of civil society institutions around education, teachers are almost universally of the opinion that the state has never adequately funded schools in Nicaragua. One female teacher in San Marcos noted that due to the priority placed on primary education by the World Bank and other IFIs the Nicaraguan state has historically provided primary schools with books and teaching materials, leaving secondary schools with very little in terms of school resources. She was not alone in attributing some of the blame for inadequate funding to IFIs, as one of her male colleagues stated that "they limit the funding that the Nicaraguan government can dedicate to certain programs and they restrict how institutions may function." Other teachers stated that they feel the government, regardless of political party in control, is at best complicit and at worst actively enforcing the relatively low percentage of public expenditures being spent on education. Most feel that it is a combination of many forces

interacting with each other to produce a situation in which there is little government revenue to spend and even less of it is spent on education.

> There are many reforms, but the governments of all political parties in Nicaragua have made the same mistake of not investing in education. Governments here look at education as an expense, not as an investment. They could try one hundred different models of education from other countries, or we could invent one hundred educational models here in Nicaragua, but if our government does not realize the importance of investing more money in education then reforms will fail (male teacher in Estelí, personal communication, July 2010).

The collective response, as summarized in the quote above, is that educational reforms primarily about ideology, whether pushed from at home or abroad, are doomed to fail in a system that lacks the resources necessary to achieve even a basic level of success.

One important aspect of teachers' understanding of the environment in which education operates in Nicaragua has to do with the concept of development and how its discourses operate as people develop their ideas about the world and others. Many explanations for economic and social issues such as low teacher salaries, miniscule investment in textbooks and classrooms, or low interest levels of parents in the education of their children began with the words "In an underdeveloped country such as Nicaragua…" or "Because Nicaragua is underdeveloped…" One male teacher in San Marcos went so far as to say "The school system is as bad as it is because we live in the fifth world."

Several teachers noted that over the course of decades in education they had internalized underfunding of Nicaragua's educational system to the point that such deficiencies in salaries, training and school facilities had become normal. Much like the scenarios described by Escobar (1995), the explanation for the current environment is the lack of development, but in order for the environment to change we need development. For many, the problem is one of attitude. One teacher in San Marcos was not alone in expressing her feelings on the issue as such. She stated, "We are an undeveloped country because we do not have the proper attitude to change." Along similar lines, other teachers cited conflict over ideological differences as the primary culprit inhibiting development. As one male teacher stated, "We are more imbued with ideology than development, and that is why we are an underdeveloped country."

STUDENTS

The responses given by students of Estelí, San Marcos and Bluefields to several questions in the surveys reflect a broad spectrum of perspectives and attitudes that broadly coalesce along geographic lines. Their thoughts regarding the set of values taught in the month of July (independence, sovereignty, nationalism and autonomy) as part of the Pro Valores program contain specific examples of the relationship between the geography and history of a place and language. As in the case of the teacher interviews, the references and the language they used to define the values were conditioned by their environments. In fact, community does more to determine language in this case than other potential explanatory variables such as SES, gender, interest in school, etc. This

may explain why some values are more prevalent in some classrooms than in others. Even though Pro Valores is part of the national standard curriculum and mandatory for all teachers the values to be taught are not discussed equally in every community.[7] For example, independence is far more commonly discussed in the classroom in Estelí (73%) than either San Marcos (48%) or Bluefields (59%). Conversely, autonomy is nearly universal in Bluefields (77%) while neither students in Estelí (23%) nor in San Marcos (22%) stated that it was discussed to a great extent in their classes.

Students in all three communities place a particular emphasis on individual attitude and responsibility in their conceptualizations of quality education. Terms such as behavior, respect, patience, good values, paying attention and listening to one another are far more central to their explanations of a good education than issues such as funding for textbooks, adequate school facilities and technology in the classroom. In their own ways, students in Estelí, San Marcos and Bluefields are reflective of the cultural and historical characteristics of their communities even as they all desire an education that will make them "*bien preparados para el futuro* (well prepared for the future)".

Definitions given for the concept of independence illustrate several key points about the sensibilities of many students in all three communities. In general, there is significant consensus about the meaning of the term independence across regions. Many of the students opted to describe the concept in distinctly individualist terms, such as the female student from Estelí who stated, "To be someone independent is to be a person that

[7] In the Appendix, there are tables for each of the four concepts for July, independence, sovereignty, nationalism and autonomy. "Yes" implies the student indicated that the concept was discussed in his or her classroom during the month of July, while "No" means that they said it was not discussed.

does what they want, says what they want, but doesn't depend on anyone to do it." The common thread in many of the responses is that independence is about not depending on others. "Independence means to fight for yourself, to think about your wellbeing, and to complete your work without the help of others," said one male student in San Marcos. Students in Bluefields express ideas about independence similar to their counterparts in San Marcos and Estelí. One male student in Bluefields defined it as "the ability to make my own decisions by myself without the help of others in order to achieve *mayor desarrollo de manera individual* (better individual development)." Several students spread across the three communities defined independence on a national level, with one Estelí student who mentions the "battle against the filibusters that resulted in triumph for Nicaragua" and another in Bluefields who refers to the Nicaragua's Declaration of Independence in 1821, but they represented a small fraction.

The term sovereignty evoked several strong and visceral responses from many of the students, and in some instances they can be characterized by geological differences. Students in Estelí commonly used terms such as peace, tranquility and solidarity in their definitions. These words were far less common in the responses of students in both San Marcos and Bluefields, who were more apt to define it as loving one's *patria* (motherland), as free expression, or as respecting national symbols. While it is difficult to ascertain for certain the sources or the motivations of language, in this case there exist social and historical characteristics of the community that can *potentially* explain the differences in definitions. The department of Estelí was an active supporter of the Sandinista Revolution, and the community and surrounding areas were witness to

incredible violence during the Contra War in the 1980s. Today the community continues to be a stronghold of the Sandinista Party and President Ortega. In the most recent national elections of 2006, the Sandinistas ran on a campaign platform that stressed peace, love and solidarity. The combination of past and present in Estelí can conceivably explain much of the differences in language used across communities.

As expected, given the history of struggle for autonomy on the Caribbean Coast, students in Bluefields demonstrate a thorough understanding of the concept of autonomy, on both a regional and ethnic level. In contrast to the individualistic undercurrent that pervades many answers in Estelí and San Marcos, and even in Bluefields with regards to independence, students see autonomy as a communal concept. As one male student defined it, autonomy involves "the laws that defend the rights of the Atlantic Coast, in other words *es la que nos respalda* (it is what supports us)." To many of them, autonomy is about a group of people having the ability to make their own decisions, or as one student puts it, "the right to have rights." Many associated the term with indigenous peoples and their rights to language and religion.

> It is the right of indigenous peoples to express and assert their rights in any situation, the right of each citizen, it gives to each person the right to express themselves in their mother tongue in topics such as religion or any other (female student in Bluefields, personal communication, August 2010).

The conceptualizations of the Bluefields students about autonomy contrast sharply with the opinions of students in San Marcos and Estelí who generally describe the term in either individual or national terms. One male student in Estelí defined autonomy

in terms of the power of government leaders, stating that "Autonomy is the power that government officials have to make their own decisions." Another student in San Marcos reflected the opinions of many in her community when she wrote, "Autonomy means to not depend on anyone else, but only depend on one's self." In many ways, their descriptions of autonomy closely mirrored those they gave for independence, and to a lesser extent sovereignty, showing a level of equivalency that is largely absent in the responses of students in Bluefields. The fact that regional differences are more clearly defined with some concepts than others is a potential indicator for how pervasive certain discourse and symbols are in different communities.

When students in all three communities were asked to define quality education their responses were generally centered on two themes: teacher preparation and enthusiasm, and student behavior in the classroom. One male student in San Marcos states that "Quality education means having a good teacher who has a great love to teach the class, as well as students that have a desire to study and learn." Many students highlighted a desire for their teachers to be more dynamic, spend more time explaining difficult topics, and allow for more questions and comments from the students. Their answers were primarily concerned with classroom practices and teaching techniques over educational resources and materials. The language used by the students in their responses is very similar to the common criticisms of the traditional or banking model of education that encourage a more dynamic classroom environment with more discussion and debates.

Many students mentioned the *comportamiento* (behavior) of their fellow classmates as a central component of quality education. One female student in Bluefields said she felt that in order for education in Nicaragua to improve students would need to "show a better attitude in the classroom, have more respect for their classmates and the teacher, and be more *animados* (excited) about learning." A significant number of students made reference to educational materials and textbooks, though interestingly only a few specifically mentioned technology as necessary for quality education. This is probably not because they feel these assets are unnecessary, but rather it is more likely that they have internalized the lack of adequate resources such as textbooks and computers to the point that their absence in education has become normalized. In lieu of sufficient educational materials that would require more financial resources than the Nicaraguan government spends on education, the focus turns to improving attitudes and behaviors to create a better learning environment.

Chapter Four: Conclusions

The case of Nicaragua's educational system involved in the current reform process presents several interesting insights as to the role of education in ideological processes in a society. As is presumably the case with other state apparatuses, ideological transmission is weakened as it disperses out from the epicenter of government and through the chain of command that starts with the Education Minister, down through the regional delegates, school directors and ultimately the teachers. At each step along the way the ideology of the state is filtered by people who use their own values and beliefs informed by their environment to interpret and either accept or reject certain aspects as they see fit. The Nicaraguan state is able to control some institutions such as the school to a certain degree, but people's personal ideologies are the result of their own belief systems and numerous other forces that are potentially more influential than the state. As previously mentioned, a few of the politically active teachers were able to recall certain ministry initiatives verbatim, but the vast majority of teachers resorted to local languages and symbols in their descriptions of education in Nicaragua and the current reform process.

Education reform is seen as a consequence of the politicization that is so pervasive in Nicaraguan society, but it is also a product of the educational system's own failings. That is, the fact that Nicaragua's educational system has historically been so ineffective *and* the constant allusion to that fact in newspapers, on television and the radio, and even within the educational system itself, leaves the Ministry susceptible to nearly continuous attempts at reform. While the underlying motives for reform may be

political or vindictive, the stated purposes and goals of every reform movement in the last three decades have been about improving the quality of education. The long-term inadequacy of the educational system perpetually creates the rationale for change. The nearly constant superficial reforms that ignore the serious underlying problems of structural inequality, widespread poverty and severe underfunding of education do little to improve the quality or even the perception of quality in schools. Thus, they create the necessity of yet another round of reforms that are received in different ways across communities.

The ideological differences between Estelí, San Marcos and Bluefields were evident throughout the interviews, demonstrating that any ideology emanating from the state interacts with the local environment in a process that creates a unique lived experience of the resulting combination. This line of argument suggests that the fulcrum of power lies not at the global level with the state, but rather at the local level with the school directors and teachers. It is the latter two groups of actors who participate in the local hierarchies of power that are instrumental in shaping behaviors and actions that are most easily observed, and therefore controlled, at the local level. This reality is not lost on the Ministry of Education. As one male regional delegate told me, "The Ministry understands very clearly that all of our new goals and initiatives depend one way or the other on the attitude of the teachers.". Power at the local level is also the rationale behind the constant personnel changes in the educational system, particularly the school directors and municipal delegates, as different political parties assume control of the state.

As ideology is mapped onto social relations it encounters other local contextual factors that restrain its ability to determine people's actions and behaviors. Teachers in the Nicaraguan school system benefit from relative autonomy that allows for small-scale acts of everyday resistance, but their propensity to actually exploit those spaces of freedom is a product of their relation to local hierarchies of power and the social and cultural capital they posses. In nearly all of the examples cited above, it was the connections to social networks and membership in certain powerful groups, as well as the knowledge and abilities needed for certain forms of resistance, that structured the ways that teachers behaved and acted. Resistance is even further contextualized by the fact that social and cultural capital are place-specific. In Estelí, where there exists a strong affiliation with the revolutionary era of the 1970 and 1980s, cultural capital is still largely reliant on the tropes of resistance to domination and refusal to be governed by people from the exterior. Consequently, teachers of all political tendencies are all but forced to resort to such language and symbols as they fashion their response to educational reforms.

Teachers in Bluefields relied on an entirely different set of cultural resources stemming from indigenous struggles for autonomy and self-definition, as well as social connections to several NGOs in the area, to assist them. In either case, the idea is that ideology does not condition behavior in the way that Gramsci's model of hegemony that produces 'consented' coercion would have us believe. Scott's model of everyday resistance, where people have relative freedom to develop their own ideologies but face stiff retribution for observable behaviors and actions, appears to fit these circumstances.

But we must extend his ideas to include considerations for the ways in which local power relations and the social and cultural capital that people may possess influence the manner and the extent to which people resist.

There is no shortage of educational materials developed by educational professionals from the Caribbean Coast that do not simply incorporate certain aspects of their culture and history, but that begin with *Costeña* society as a foundation of the curriculum and then extend out from there (Castillo & McLean, 2007). The reality is that in many cases teachers on the Coast, like those in Bluefields, already incorporate as much of this material as they can, extending beyond the limits in some cases. Teachers in Bluefields are part of a social network that in addition to extending protection to some and not to others, based on social and cultural capital, also extends a limited amount of cover for all groups in the face of encroachment or imposition from outside. The problem then is that perennial resistance to a policy that is hardly enforced creates an endless cycle of rejection and disheartenment that detrimentally affects education on the Caribbean Coast. The 70/30 curriculum rule is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, but the Education Ministry would do better to recognize that local control of the curriculum can also include incorporation of other information and activities when the educational materials are produced, and not solely when they are taught in the classroom.

The idea that local power relations problematize processes of ideological dissemination is complicated in the case of Nicaragua by the fact that the state is attempting to promote an ideology that contrasts sharply with other competing ideologies

in society. The Sandinista Party espouses an ideology that it says is counter-hegemonic and opposed to the neoliberal philosophy that has pervaded Nicaraguan society since 1990. The institution of education, as part of the state, is central to this effort to propagate an oppositional ideology, but it suffers from the fact that there are few other social institutions, such as the church or ways of organizing around commerce, that espouse similar values and ideas. The state's ideology is counter to the dominant religious, economic and social values that are suited towards the existing capitalist society. This is not to say that all religious and economic institutions in Nicaraguan society maintain identical ideologies, but they are similar enough to be incorporated into the dominant ideology without upsetting the status quo. In the process, they provide 'natural' supports for each other that allow them to become normal, or at least accepted, modes of thought in society.

The inability of the current Nicaraguan state to implement such a counter-hegemonic ideological project using the education system is due to several factors. As universally noted by the teachers and students alike, education at all levels in Nicaragua is severely underfunded, and it lacks the resources to effectively transmit information, regardless of ideology. The failure of the project can also be attributed in part to the lack of surrounding social supports that espouse a similar ideology. Ideologies are able to persist then they are based on everyday practices and power relations. In this case, a socialist ideology would benefit from large cooperatives providing communal employment, or popular media and religious institutions able to widely disseminate ideas across Nicaraguan society. The Sandinista government simply does not have the material

resources to create other social supports, such as new forms of social, economic and political organizing, on the scale necessary to effect large-scale change.

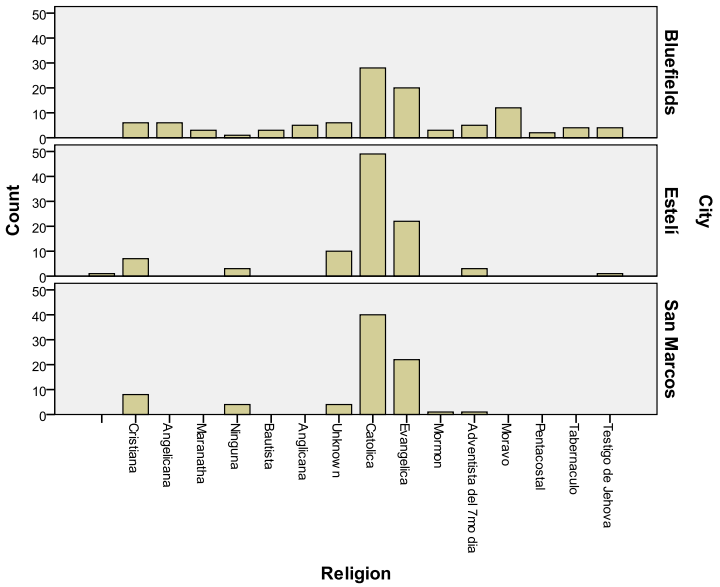
The Nicaraguan educational system, as an institution of the state, is a reflection of power relations in society. The divided population has produced a divided state that has not settled on a clear ideological path for an extensive period of time in at least the last three decades. In the interim, global forces have actively pursued an ideological hegemony through religious, economic and social practices that support the dominant class. Globalized capitalism based on access to markets and individual responsibility has its own accompanying ideology that is extremely pervasive in contemporary Nicaragua, as well as the rest of Latin America. The issue is that even the market must provide enough resources to satisfy the needs and desires of a significant percentage of the population, and this is not the case in Nicaragua's educational system. The situation that results from the conflict of these two forces is one in which no governing ideology has sufficient resources to become dominant, and geographic and historical conditions of locations take precedence. More research remains to be done about how these national and international forces interface with the local matrix of power relations in ways that create entirely unique outcomes.

Appendix

Student demographics

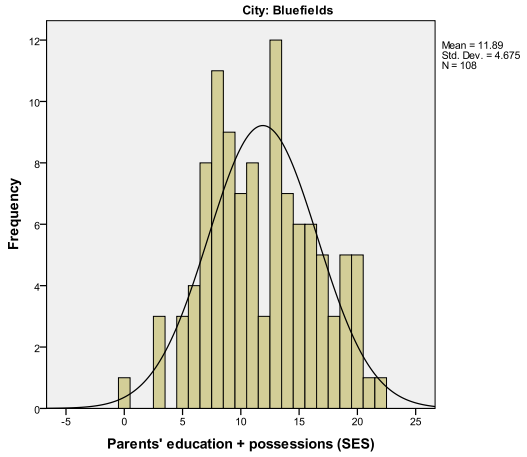
Gender

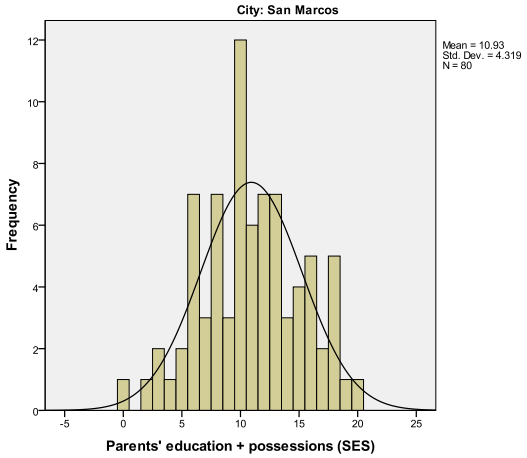
City			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Missing	System	14	100.0		
Bluefields	Valid	Masculine	39	36.1	37.5	37.5
		Feminine	65	60.2	62.5	100.0
		Total	104	96.3	100.0	
	Missing	System	4	3.7		
	Total		108	100.0		
Estelí	Valid	Masculine	37	38.5	38.9	38.9
		Feminine	58	60.4	61.1	100.0
		Total	95	99.0	100.0	
	Missing	System	1	1.0		
	Total		96	100.0		
San Marcos	Valid	Masculine	30	37.5	37.5	37.5
		Feminine	50	62.5	62.5	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	

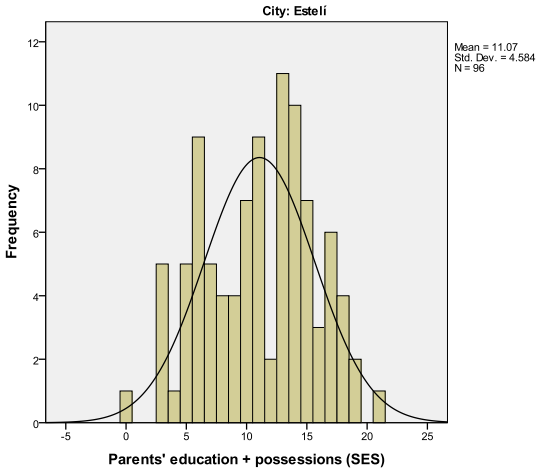


Statistics

City			Mother's education	Father's education	Total cultural possessions	SES Score
Bluefields	N	Valid	102	90	107	108
		Missing	6	18	1	0
	Mean		2.87	2.92	3.28	11.89
	Median		3.00	3.00	4.00	11.50
	Minimum		1	1	1	0
	Maximum		5	5	6	22
Estelí	N	Valid	90	73	94	96
		Missing	6	23	2	0
	Mean		2.87	2.52	2.91	11.07
	Median		3.00	2.00	3.00	11.00
	Minimum		1	0	1	0
	Maximum		5	5	6	21
San Marcos	N	Valid	77	72	78	80
		Missing	3	8	2	0
	Mean		2.65	2.74	2.72	10.93
	Median		2.00	3.00	3.00	11.00
	Minimum		1	1	1	0
	Maximum		5	5	6	20


City: Bluefields
Mean = 11.89
Std. Dev. = 4.675
N = 108
Frequency
Parents' education + possessions (SES)


City: San Marcos
Mean = 10.93
Std. Dev. = 4.319
N = 80
Frequency
Parents' education + possessions (SES)


City: Estelí
Mean = 11.07
Std. Dev. = 4.584
N = 96
Frequency
Parents' education + possessions (SES)

Whether topic was discussed – Independence

City			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Missing	System	14	100.0		
Bluefields	Valid	Yes	55	50.9	59.1	59.1
		No	38	35.2	40.9	100.0
		Total	93	86.1	100.0	
	Missing	System	15	13.9		
	Total		108	100.0		
Estelí	Valid	Yes	66	68.8	72.5	72.5
		No	25	26.0	27.5	100.0
		Total	91	94.8	100.0	
	Missing	System	5	5.2		
	Total		96	100.0		
San Marcos	Valid	Yes	34	42.5	47.9	47.9
		No	37	46.3	52.1	100.0
		Total	71	88.8	100.0	
	Missing	System	9	11.3		
	Total		80	100.0		

Whether topic was discussed – Sovereignty

City			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Missing	System	14	100.0		
Bluefields	Valid	Yes	24	22.2	32.0	32.0
		No	51	47.2	68.0	100.0
		Total	75	69.4	100.0	
	Missing	System	33	30.6		
	Total		108	100.0		
Estelí	Valid	Yes	52	54.2	66.7	66.7
		No	26	27.1	33.3	100.0
		Total	78	81.3	100.0	
	Missing	System	18	18.8		
	Total		96	100.0		
San Marcos	Valid	Yes	8	10.0	13.8	13.8
		No	50	62.5	86.2	100.0
		Total	58	72.5	100.0	
	Missing	System	22	27.5		
	Total		80	100.0		

Whether topic was discussed – Nationalism

City			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Valid		14	100.0	100.0	100.0
Bluefields	Valid		34	31.5	31.5	31.5
		Yes	37	34.3	34.3	65.7
		No	37	34.3	34.3	100.0
		Total	108	100.0	100.0	
Estelí	Valid		22	22.9	22.9	22.9
		Yes	51	53.1	53.1	76.0
		No	22	22.9	22.9	99.0
		2, poco	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
		Total	96	100.0	100.0	
San Marcos	Valid		15	18.8	18.8	18.8
		Yes	32	40.0	40.0	58.8
		No	33	41.3	41.3	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Whether topic was discussed – Autonomy

City			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Missing	System	14	100.0		
Bluefields	Valid	Yes	64	59.3	77.1	77.1
		No	19	17.6	22.9	100.0
		Total	83	76.9	100.0	
	Missing	System	25	23.1		
	Total		108	100.0		
Estelí	Valid	Yes	15	15.6	23.4	23.4
		No	49	51.0	76.6	100.0
		Total	64	66.7	100.0	
	Missing	System	32	33.3		
	Total		96	100.0		
San Marcos	Valid	Yes	11	13.8	22.0	22.0
		No	39	48.8	78.0	100.0
		Total	50	62.5	100.0	
	Missing	System	30	37.5		
	Total		80	100.0		

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